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PAUL'S PRAYERS

AND OTHER SERMONS

ALEXANDER MacLAREN, D.D.

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AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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I.

Worthy of your Calling.

"We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him."—2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

IN the former letter to the Church of Thessalonica, the Apostle had dwelt, in ever-memorable words — which sound like a prelude of the trump of God—on the coming of Christ at the end to judge the world and to gather His servants into His rest. That great thought seems to have excited some of the hotter heads in Thessalonica, and to have led to a general feverishness of unwholesome expectancy of the near approach or actual dawn of the day. This letter is intended as a supplement to the former epistle, and to damp down the fire which had been kindled. It, therefore, dwells with emphasis on the necessary preliminaries to the dawning of that day of the Lord, and throughout seeks to lead the excited spirits to patience and persistent work, and to calm their feverish expectations. This purpose colours the whole letter.

Another striking characteristic of it is the frequent gushes of short prayer for the Thessalonians with which the writer turns aside from the main current of his thoughts. In its brief compass there are four of these prayers, which, taken together, present many aspects of the Christian life, and hold out much for our hopes and much for our efforts. The prayer which I have read for our text this morning is the first of these. The others, the consideration of which will follow on subsequent occasions, are these:—"Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work."

And, again, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

And, finally, summing up all, "The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always, by all means." So full, so tender, so directed to the highest blessings and to those only, are the wishes of a true Christian teacher, and of a true Christian friend, for those to whom He ministers and whom He loves. It is a poor love that cannot express itself in prayer. It is an earthly love which desires for its objects anything less than the highest of blessings.

I.—Notice, first, here, the Divine test for Christian lives: "We pray for you, that God would count you worthy of your calling."

Now, it is to be observed that this "counting worthy" refers mainly to a future estimate to be made by God of the completed career and permanent character brought out of earth into another state by

Christian souls. That is obvious from the whole strain of the letter, which I have already pointed out as mainly being concerned with the future coming to judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also, I think, made probable by the fact that the same expression, "counting worthy," occurs in an earlier verse of this chapter, where the reference is exclusively to the future judgment.

So, then, we are brought face to face with this thought of an actual, stringent judgment which God will apply in the future to the lives and characters of professing Christians. Now, that is a great deal too much forgotten in our popular Christian teaching and in our average Christian faith. It is perfectly true that he that trusts in Jesus Christ "will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life." But it is just as true that "judgment shall begin at the house of God," and that "the Lord will judge His people." And, therefore, it becomes us to lay to heart this truth, that we, just because, if we are Christians, we stand nearest to God, are surest to be searched through and through by the light that streams from Him, and to have every flaw and corrupt speck and black spot brought out into startling prominence. Let no Christian man fancy that he shall escape the righteous judgment of God. The great doctrine of forgiveness does not mean that He suffers our sin to remain upon us unjudged, ay! or unavenged. But just as, day by day, there is an actual estimate in the Divine mind, according to truth, of what we really are, so, at the last, God's servants shall be gathered before His throne. "They that have made a covenant with Him by

sacrifice" shall be assembled there—as the Psalm has it—"that the Lord may judge His people."

Then, if the actual passing of a Divine judgment day by day, and a future solemn act of judgment after we have done with earth, and our characters are completed, and our careers rounded into a whole, is to be looked for by Christians, what is the standard by which their worthiness is to be judged?

"Your calling." The "this" of my text in the Authorised Version is a supplement, and a better supplement is that of the Revised Version, "your calling." Now *calling* does not mean "avocation" or "employment," as I perhaps need scarcely explain, but the Divine fact of our having been summoned by Him to be His. Consider who calls. God Himself. Consider how He calls. By the Gospel, by Jesus Christ, or, as another apostle has it, "by His own glory and virtue" manifested in the world. That great voice which is in Jesus Christ, so tender, so searching, so heart-melting, so vibrating with the invitation of love and the yearning of a longing heart, summons or calls us. Consider, also, what this calling is to. "God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness," or, as this letter has it, in another part, "unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." By all the subduing and animating and restraining and impelling tones in the sacrifice and life of Jesus Christ we are summoned to a life of self-crucifixion, of subjection of the flesh, of aspiration after God, of holy living according to the pattern that was showed us in Him. We are summoned here and now to a life of purity and righteousness and self-sacrifice. But also "He hath called us

to His everlasting kingdom and glory." That voice sounds from above now. From the Cross it said to us, "I die that ye may live"; from the Throne it says to us, "Live because I live, and come to live where I live." The same invitation, which calls us to a life of righteousness and self-suppression and purity, also calls us, with the sweet promise that is firm as the Throne of God, to the everlasting felicities of that perfect kingdom in which, because the obedience is entire, the glory shall be untremulous and unstained. Therefore, considering Who summons, by what He summons, and to what He calls us, do there not lie in the fact of that Divine call to which we Christians say that we have yielded, the solemnest motives, the loftiest standard, the most stringent obligations for life? What sort of a life will that be which is worthy of that voice? Is yours? Is mine? Are there not the most flagrant examples of professing Christians, whose lives are in the most outrageous discordance with the lofty obligations and mighty motives of the summons which they profess to have obeyed? "Worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called!" Have I made my own the things which I am invited to possess? Have I yielded to the obligations which are enwrapped in that invitation? Does my life correspond to the Divine purpose in calling me to be His? Can I say, "Lord, Thou art mine, and I am Thine, and here my life witnesses to it, because self is banished from it, and I am full of God, and the life which I live in the flesh I live not to myself, but to Him that died for me"?

An absolute correspondence, a complete worthiness or perfect desert, is impossible for us all, but a worthi-

ness which His merciful judgment who makes allowance for us all may accept, as not too flagrantly contradictory of what He meant us to be, is possible even for our poor attainments and our stained lives. If it were Paul's supreme prayer, should it not be our supreme aim, that we may be worthy of Him that hath called us, and "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called"?

II.—Note, here, the Divine help to meet the test.

If it were a matter of our own effort alone, who of us could pretend to reach to the height of conformity with the great design of the loving Father in summoning us, or with the mighty powers that are set in motion by the summons for the purifying of men's lives? But here is the great characteristic and blessing of God's Gospel, that it not only summons us to holiness and to heaven, but reaches out a hand to help us thither. Therein it contrasts with all other voices—and many of them are noble and pathetic in their insistence and vehemence—which call men to lofty lives. Whether it be the voice of conscience, or of human ethics, or of the great ones, the elect of the race, who, in every age, have been as voices crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord"—all these call us, but reach no hand out to draw us. They are all as voices from the heights and are of God, but they are voices only. They summon us to noble deeds, and leave us floundering in the mire.

But we have not a God who tells us to be good, and then watches to see if we will obey, but we have a God who, with all His summonses, brings to us the help to keep His commandments. Our God has more than a voice to enjoin, He has a hand to lift. "Give what

Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt," said Augustine. There is the blessing and glory of the Gospel, that its summons has in it an impelling power which makes men able to be what it enjoins them to become. My text, therefore, follows the prayer "that God would count you worthy," which contemplates God simply as judging men's correspondence with the ideal revealed in their calling, with the look of faith to the giving God, who works in us, if we will let Him, that which He enjoins on us. There are two directions of that Divine working specified in the text. Paul asks that God would fulfil "every desire of goodness and every work of faith," as the Revised Version renders the words. Two things, then, we may hope that God will do for us—He will fulfil every yearning after righteousness and purity in our hearts, and will perfect the active energy which faith puts forth in our lives.

Paul says, in effect, first, that God will fulfil every desire that longs for goodness. He is scarcely deserving of being called good who does not desire to be better. Aspiration must always be ahead of performance in a growing life, such as every Christian life ought to be. To long for any righteousness and beauty of goodness is, in some imperfect and incipient measure, to possess the good for which we long. This is the very signature of a Christian life—yearning after unaccomplished perfection. If you know nothing of that desire that stings and impels you onwards; if you do not know what it is to say, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" if you do not know what it is to follow the fair ideal realized in Jesus Christ with infinite longing,

what right have you to call yourself a Christian? The very essence of the Christian life is yearning for completeness, and restlessness as long as sin has any power over us. We live not only by admiration, faith, and love, but we live by hope; and he who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness has yet to learn what be the first principles of the Gospel of Christ.

If there be not the desire after goodness, the restlessness and dissatisfaction with every present good, the brave ambition that says, "Forgetting the things that are behind I reach forth unto the things that are before," there is nothing in a man to which God's grace can attach itself. God cannot make you better if you do not wish to be better. There is no point upon which His hallowing and ennobling grace can lay hold in your hearts without such desire. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." If, as is too often the case with hosts of professing Christians, you shut your mouths tight and lock your teeth, how can God put any food between your lips? There must, first of all, be the aspiration, and then there will be the satisfaction.

I look out upon my congregation, or, better still, I look into my own heart, and I say, If I, if you, dear brethren, are not worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, we have not because we ask not. If there be no desire after goodness in our hearts, God cannot make us good. Our wishes are the mould into which the molten metal from the great furnace of His love will run. If we bring but a little vessel we cannot get a large supply. The manna lies round our tents; it is for us to determine how much we will gather.

And in like manner, says Paul, God will fulfil every work of faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ will naturally tend to influence our lives, and to manifest itself as a driving power which will set all the wheels of conduct in motion. Paul is quite sure that if we trust ourselves to God, all the beneficent and holy work that flows from such confidence will by Him be fully perfected.

God's fulfilment is to be done *with power*. That is to say, He will fit us to be worthy of our calling, He will answer our desires, He will give energy to our faith, and complete in number and in quality its operations in our lives, by reason of His dwelling with us and in us by that spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind which works all righteousness in believing hearts, and sheds Divine beauty and goodness over character and life.

III.—Lastly, note the Divine glory of the Worthy.

This fulfilment of every desire of goodness and work of faith is in order "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in Him.'

Here, again, as in the first clause of our text, I take, in accordance with the prevailing tone of this letter, the reference to be mainly, though perhaps not exclusively, to a future transcendent glorifying of the name of Christ in perfected saints, and glorifying of perfected saints in Jesus Christ.

We have, then, set forth, first, as the result of the fulfilling of Christian men's desires after goodness, and the work of their faith, the glory that accrues to Christ from perfected saints. They are His workmanship. You remember the old story of the artist

who went into a fellow-artist's studio and left upon the easel one complete circle, swept with one master-whirl of the brush. Jesus Christ presents perfected men to an admiring universe as specimens of what He can do. His highest work is the redeeming of poor creatures like you and me, and the making of us perfect in goodness and worthy of our calling. We are His *chefs d'œuvre,* the master work of the great Divine artist.

Think, then, brethren, how, here and now, Christ's reputation is in our hands. Men judge of Him by us. The name of the Lord Jesus is glorified in you if you live "worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," and people will think better of the Master if His disciples are faithful. Depend upon it, if this church, for instance, and the Christian people within these walls now, lived the lives that they ought to do, and manifested the power of the Gospel as they might, there would be many who would say, "They have been with Jesus, and the Jesus that has made them what they are must be mighty and great." The best evidence of the power of the Gospel is your consistent lives.

Think, too, of that strange dignity that in the future, in manners and in regions all undiscernible by us, Christians, who have been made out of stones into children of God, will make known "unto principalities and powers in heavenly places" the wisdom and the love and the energy of the redeeming God. Who knows to what regions the commission of the perfected saints to make Christ known may carry them? Light travels far, and we cannot tell into what remote corners of the universe this may penetrate.

This only we know, that they who shall be counted worthy to attain that life and the resurrection from the dead shall bear the image of the heavenly, and perhaps to creations yet uncreated, and still to be evolved through the ages of Eternity, it may be their part to carry the lustre of the light of the glory of God who redeemed and purified them.

On the other hand, there is glory accruing to perfected saints in Christ. "And ye in Him." There will be a union so close as that nothing closer is possible, personality being preserved, between Christ and the saints above, who trust Him and love Him and serve Him there. And that union will lead to a participation in His glory which shall exalt their limited, stained, and fragmentary humanity into "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Astronomers tell us that dead, cold matter falls from all corners of the system into the sun, drawn by its magic magnetism from farthest space, and, plunging into that great reservoir of fire, the deadest and coldest matter glows with fervid heat and dazzling light. So you and I, dead, cold, dull, opaque, heavy fragments, drawn into mysterious oneness with Christ, the Sun of our souls, shall be transformed into His own image, and like Him be light and heat which shall radiate through the universe.

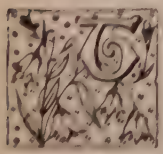
Brethren, meditate on your calling, the fact, its method, its aim, its obligations, and its powers. Cherish hopes and desires after goodness, the only hopes and desires that are certain to be fulfilled. Cultivate the life of faith working by love, and let us all live in the light of that solemn expectation that

the Lord will judge His people. Then we may hope that the voice which summoned us will welcome us, and proclaim even of us, stained and undeserving as we rightly feel ourselves to be: "They have not defiled their garments, therefore they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

II.

Everlasting Consolation and Good Hope.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."—2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.



THIS is the second of the four brief prayers which, as I pointed out in my last sermon, break the current of Paul's teaching in this letter, and witness to the depth of his affection to his Thessalonian converts. We do not know the special circumstances under which these then were, but there are many allusions, both in the first and second epistles, which seem to indicate that they especially needed the gift of consolation.

They were a young Church, just delivered from paganism. Like lambs in the midst of wolves, they stood amongst bitter enemies, their teacher had left them alone, and their raw convictions needed to be consolidated and matured in the face of much opposition. No wonder then that over and over again, in both letters, we have references to the persecutions and tribulations which they endured, and to the consolations which would much more abound.

But whatever may have been their specific circumstances, the prayer which puts special emphasis on comfort is as much needed by each of us as it could ever have been by any of them. For there are no eyes that have not wept, or will not weep; no breath that has not been, or will not be, drawn in sighs; and no hearts that have not bled or will not bleed. So, dear friends, the prayer that went up for these long since comforted brothers, in their forgotten obscure sorrows, is as needful for each of us—that the God who has given everlasting consolation may apply the consolations which He has supplied, and "comfort our hearts and stablish them in every good word and work."

The prayer naturally falls, as all true prayer will, into three sections—the contemplation of Him to whom it is addressed, the grasping of the great act on which it is based, and the specification of the desires which it includes. These three thoughts may guide us for a few moments now.

I.—First of all, then, note the Divine hearers of the prayer.

The first striking thing about this prayer is its emphatic recognition of the Divinity of Jesus Christ as a truth familiar to these Thessalonian converts. Note the solemn accumulation of His august titles, "Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself." Note, further, that extraordinary association of His name with the Father's. Note, still further, the most remarkable order in which these two names occur—Jesus first, God second. If we were not so familiar with the words, and with their order, which reappears in Paul's well-known and frequently-used Benediction, we should be startled to find that Jesus Christ was put

before God in such a solemn address. The association and the order of mention of the names are equally outrageous, profane, and inexplicable, except upon one hypothesis, and that is that Jesus Christ is Divine.

The reason for the order may be found partly in the context, which has just been naming Christ, but still more in the fact that whilst he writes, the Apostle is realizing the mediation of Christ, and that the order of mention is the order of our approach. The Father comes to us in the Son; we come to the Father by the Son; and, therefore, it is no intercepting of our reverence, nor blasphemously lifting the creature to undue elevation, when in one act the Apostle appeals to "our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father."

Note, still further, the distinct address to Christ as the Hearer of Prayer. And, note, last of all, about this matter, the singular grammatical irregularity in my text, which is something much more than a mere blunder or slip of the pen. The words which follow, —viz., "comfort" and "stablish"—are in the singular, whilst these two mighty and august names are their nominatives, and would therefore, by all regularity, require a plural to follow them. That this peculiarity is no mere accident, but intentional and deliberate, is made probable by the two instances in our text, and is made certain, as it seems to me, by the fact that the same anomalous and eloquent construction occurs in the previous epistle to the same Church, where we have in exact parallelism with our text, "God Himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ," with the singular verb, "direct our way unto you." The

thinking about when he dared to say, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father." And I beseech you to ask yourself the question whether your faith accepts that great teaching, and whether to you He is far more than "the Man Christ Jesus"; and just because he is *the* man, is therefore the Son of God. Brethren! Either Jesus lies in an unknown grave, ignorant of all that is going on here, and the notion that He can help is a delusion and a dream, or else He is the everliving because He is the Divine Christ, to whom we poor men can speak with the certainty that He hears us, and who wields the energies of Deity, and works the same works as the Father, for the help and blessing of the souls that trust Him.

II.—Secondly, note the great fact on which this prayer builds itself.

The form of words in the original, "loved" and "given," all but necessarily requires us to suppose that their reference is to some one definite historical act in which the love was manifested, and, as love always does, found voice in giving. Love is the infinite desire to bestow, and its language is always a gift. Then, according to the Apostle's thought, there is some one act in which all the fulness of the Divine love manifests itself; some one act in which all the treasures which God can bestow upon men are conveyed and handed over to a world.

The statement that there is such renders almost unnecessary the question what such an act is. For there can be but one in all the sweep of the magnificent and beneficent Divine deeds, so correspondent to His love, and so inclusive of all His giving, as that it shall be the ground of our confidence and the warrant

lation outlasting all sorrows—these things were given once for all, to the whole world when Jesus Christ came and lived and died. The materials for a comfort that shall never fail me, and for the foundation and the object of a hope that shall never be ashamed, are supplied in Jesus Christ our Lord. And so these gifts, already passed under the great seal of heaven, and confirmed to us all, if we choose to take them for ours, are the ground upon which the largest prayers may be rested, and the most ardent desires may be unblamably cherished, in the full confidence that no petitions of ours can reach to the greatness of the Divine purpose, and that the widest and otherwise wildest of our hopes and wishes are sober underestimates of what God has already given to us. For if He has given the material, He will apply what He has supplied. And if He has thus in the past bestowed the possibilities of comfort and hope upon the world, He will not slack His hand, if we desire the possibility to be in our hearts turned into the actuality.

God has given, therefore God will give. That is Heaven's logic, but it does not do for men. It presupposes inexhaustible resources, unchangeable purposes of kindness, patience that is not disgusted and cannot be turned away by our sin. These things being presupposed it is true; and the prayer of my text, that God would comfort, can have no firmer foundation than the confidence of my text, that God has given "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." "Thou hast helped us; leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation."

III.—The last thing here is the petitions based upon

the contemplation of the Divine hearers of the prayer and of the gift already bestowed by God.

May He "comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." I have already said all that perhaps is necessary in regard of the connection between the past gift of everlasting consolation and the present and future comforting of hearts which is here desired. It seems to me that the Apostle has in his mind the distinction between the great work of Christ, in which are supplied for us the materials for comfort and hope, and the present and continuous work of that Divine Spirit, by which God dwelling in our hearts in Jesus Christ makes real for each of us the universal gift of consolation and of hope. God has bestowed the materials for comfort; God will give the comfort for which He has supplied the materials. It were a poor thing if all that we could expect from our loving Father in the heavens were that He should contribute to us what might make us peaceful and glad and calm in sorrow, if we chose to use it. Men comfort from without; God steals into the heart, and there diffuses the aroma of His presence. Christ comes into the ship before He says, "Peace! be still!" It is not enough for our poor troubled hearts that there should be calmness and consolation twining round the Cross if we choose to pluck the fruit. We need, and therefore we have, an indwelling God who, by that Spirit which is the Comforter, will make for each of us the everlasting consolation which He has bestowed upon the world our individual possession. God's husbandry is not merely broadcast sowing of the seed, but the planting in each individual heart of the precious germ. And the God who has given everlast-

ing consolation to a whole world will comfort *thy* heart.

Then, again, the comforted heart will be a stable heart. Our fixedness and stability are not natural immobility, but communicated steadfastness. There must be, first, the consolation of Christ before there can be the calmness of a settled heart. We all know how vacillating, how driven to and fro by gusts of passion and winds of doctrine and forces of earth our resolutions and spirits are. But thistledown glued to a firm surface will be firm, and any light thing lashed to a solid one will be solid; and reeds shaken with the wind may be turned into brazen pillars that cannot be moved. If we have Christ in our hearts, He will be our consolation first and our stability next. Why should it be that we are spasmodic and fluctuating, and the slaves of ups and downs, like some barometer in stormy weather; now at "set fair," and then away down where "much rain" is written? There is no need for it. Get Christ into your heart, and your mercury will stand at one height. Why should it be that at one hour the flashing waters fill the harbour, and that six hours afterwards there is a waste of ooze and filth? It need not be. Our hearts may be like some land-locked lake that knows no tide. "His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

The comforted and stable heart will be a fruitful heart. "In *every* good word and work." Ah! how fragmentary is our goodness, like the broken torsos of the statues of fair gods dug up in some classic land. There is no reason why each of us should not appropriate and make our own the forms of goodness to which we are least naturally inclined, and cultivate

and possess a symmetrical, fully-developed, all-round goodness, in some humble measure after the pattern of Jesus Christ our Lord. Practical righteousness, "in every good word and work," is the outcome of all the sacred and secret consolations and blessings that Jesus Christ imparts. There are many Christian people who are like those swallow-holes, as they call them, characteristic of limestone countries, where a great river plunges into a cave and is no more heard of. You do not get your comforts and your blessing for that, brother, but in order that all the joy and peace, all the calmness and the communion, that you realize in the secret place of the Most High, may be translated into goodness and manifest righteousness in the market-place and the street. We get our goodness where we get our consolation, from Jesus Christ and His Cross.

And so, dear friends, all your comforts will die, and your sorrows will live, unless you have Christ for your own. The former will be like some application that is put on a poisoned bite, which will soothe it for a moment, but as soon as the anodyne dries off the skin, the poison will tingle and burn again, and will be working in the blood, whilst the remedy only touched the surface of the flesh. All your hopes will be like a child's castles on the sand, which the next tide will smooth out and obliterate, unless your hope is fixed on Him. You may have everlasting consolation, you may have a hope which will enable you to look serenely on the ills of life, and on the darkness of death, and on what darkly looms beyond death. You may have a calmed and steadied heart; you may have an all-round, stable, comprehensive goodness.

But there is only one way to get these blessings, and that is to grasp and make our own, by simple faith and constant clinging, that great gift, given once for all in Jesus Christ, the gift of comfort that never dies, and of hope that never deceives, and then to apply that gift day by day, through God's good Spirit, to sorrows and trials and duties as they emerge.

III.

The Heart's Home and Guide.

"THE Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."—2 THESS. iii. 5.

A WORD or two of explanation of terms may preface our remarks on this, the third of the Apostle's prayers for the Thessalonians in this letter. The first point to be noticed is that by "the Lord" here is meant, as usually in the New Testament, Jesus Christ. So that here again we have the distinct recognition of His Divinity, and the direct address of prayer to Him.

The next thing to notice is that by "the love of God" is here meant, not God's to us, but ours to Him; and that the petition, therefore, respects the emotions and sentiments of the Thessalonians towards the Father in heaven.

And the last point is that the rendering of the Authorized Version, "patient waiting for Christ," is better exchanged for that of the Revised Version, "the patience of Christ," meaning thereby the same patience as He exhibited in His earthly life, and which He is ready to bestow upon us.

It is not usual in the New Testament to find Jesus

Christ set forth as the great Example of patient endurance; but still there are one or two instances in which the same expression is applied to Him. For example, in two contiguous verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of His "enduring contradiction of sinners against Himself," and "enduring the cross, despising the shame," in both of which cases we have the verb employed of which the noun is here used. Then in the Apocalypse we have such expressions as "the patience of Christ," of which John says that he and his brethren whom he is addressing are "participators," and, again, "thou hast kept the word of my patience."

So, though unusual, the thought of our text as presented in the amended version is by no means singular. These things, then, being premised, we may now look at this petition as a whole.

I.—The first thought that it suggests to me is, the home of the heart.

"The Lord direct you *into* the love of God and the patience of Christ." The prayers in this letter with which we have been occupied for some Sundays present to us Christian perfection under various aspects. But this we may, perhaps, say is the most comprehensive and condensed of them all. The Apostle gathers up the whole sum of his desires for his friends, and presents to us the whole aim of our efforts for ourselves, in these two things, a steadfast love to God, and a calm endurance of evil and persistence in duty, unaffected by suffering or by pain. If we have these two we shall not be far from being what God wishes to see us.

Now the Apostle's thought here, of "leading us

into" these two, seems to suggest the metaphor of a great home with two chambers in it, of which the inner was entered from the outer. The first room is "the love of God," and the second is "the patience of Christ." It comes to the same thing whether we speak of the heart as dwelling in love, or of love as dwelling in the heart. The metaphor varies, the substance of the thought is the same, and that thought is that the heart should be the sphere and subject of a steadfast, habitual, all-pleasing love, which issues in unbroken calmness of endurance and persistence of service, in the face of evil.

Let us look, then, for a moment at these two points. I need not dwell upon the bare idea of love to God as being the characteristic of the Christian attitude towards Him, or remind you of how strange and unexampled a thing it is that all religion should be reduced to this one fruitful germ, love to the Father in heaven. But it is more to the purpose for me to point to the constancy, the unbrokenness, the depth, which the Apostle here desires should be the characteristics of Christian love to God. We sometimes cherish such emotion; but, alas, how rare it is for us to dwell in that calm home all the days of our lives! We visit that serene sanctuary at intervals, and then for the rest of our days we are hurried to and fro between contending affections, and wander homeless amidst inadequate loves. But what Paul asked, and what should be the conscious aim of the Christian life, is, that we should "dwell all our days in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to enquire in His Temple."

Alas, when we think of our own experiences, how

fair and far seems that other, contemplated as a possibility in my text, that our hearts should "abide in the love of God"!

Let me remind you, too, that steadfastness of habitual love all round our hearts, as it were, is the source and germ of all perfectness of life and conduct. "Love, and do as Thou wilt," is a bold saying, but not too bold. For the very essence of love is the smelting of the will of the lover into the will of the beloved. And there is nothing so certain as that, in regard of all human relations, and in regard of the relation to God which in many respects follows, and is moulded after the pattern of our earthly relations of love, to have the heart fixed in pure affection is to have the whole life subordinated in glad obedience. Nothing is so sweet as to do the beloved's will. The germ of all righteousness, as well as the characteristic spirit of every righteous deed, lies in love to God. This is the mother-tincture which, variously coloured and with various additions, makes all the different precious liquids which we can pour as libations on His altar. The one saving salt of all deeds in reference to Him is that they are the outcome and expression of a loving heart. He who loves is righteous, and doeth righteousness. So, "love is the fulfilling of the law."

That the heart should be fixed in its abode in love to God is the secret of all blessedness, as it is the source of all righteousness. Love is always joy in itself; it is the one deliverance from self—bondage to which self is the one curse and misery of man. The emancipation from care and sorrow and unrest lies in that going out of ourselves which we call by the name of love. There be things masquerading

about the world, and profaning the sacred name of love by taking it to themselves, which are only selfishness under a disguise. But true love is the annihilation, and therefore the apotheosis and glorifying of self; and in that annihilation lies the secret charm which brings all blessedness into a life.

But, then, though love in itself be always bliss, yet, by reason of the imperfections of its objects, it sometimes leads to sorrow. For limitations and disappointments and inadequacies of all sorts haunt our earthly loves whilst they last; and we have all to see them fade, or to fade away from them. The thing you love may change, the thing you love must die; and therefore love, which in itself is blessedness, hath often, like the little book that the prophet swallowed, a bitter taste remaining when the sweetness is gone. But if we set our hearts on God, we set our hearts on that which knows no variableness, neither the shadow of turning. *There* are no inadequate responses, no changes that we need fear. On that love the scythe of death, which mows down all other products of the human heart, hath no power; and its stem stands untouched by the keen edge that levels all the rest of the herbage. Love God, and thou lovest Eternity; and therefore the joy of the love is eternal as its object. So he who loves God is building upon a rock. And whosoever has this for his treasure carries his wealth with him whithersoever he goes.

Well may the Apostle gather into one potent word, and one mighty wish, the whole fulness of his desires for his friends. And wise shall we be if we make this the chiefest of our aims, that our hearts may have their home in the love of God.

Still further, there is another chamber in this house of the soul. The outer room, where the heart inhabits that loves God, leads into another compartment, "the patience of Christ."

Now, I suppose I need not remind many of you that this great New Testament word "patience" has a far wider area of meaning than that which is ordinarily covered by that expression. For *patience*, as we use it, is simply a passive virtue. But the thing that is meant by the New Testament word which is generally so rendered has an active as well as a passive side. On the passive side it is the calm, unmurmuring, unreluctant submission of the will to whatsoever evil may come upon us, either directly from God's hand, or through the ministration and mediation of "men who are His sword." On the active side it is the steadfast persistence in the path of duty, in spite of all that may array itself against us. So there are the two halves of the virtue which is here put before us—unmurmuring submission and bold continuance in well-doing, whatsoever storms may hurtle in our faces.

Now, in both of these aspects, the life of Jesus Christ is the great pattern. As for the passive side, need I remind you how, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth"? "When He was reviled He reviled not again, but committed Himself unto Him that judgeth uprightly." No anger ever flushed His cheek or contracted His brow. He never repaid scorn with scorn, nor hate with hate. All men's malice fell upon Him, like sparks upon wet timber, and kindled no conflagration.

As for the active side, I need not remind you how

"He set His face to go to Jerusalem"—how the great solemn "*must*" which ruled His life bore Him on, steadfast and without deflection in His course, through all obstacles. There never was such heroic force as the quiet force of the meek and gentle Christ, which wasted no strength in displaying or boasting of itself, but simply, silently, unconquerably, like the secular motions of the stars, dominated all opposition, and carried Him, unhasting and unresting, on His path. That life, with all its surface of meekness, had an iron tenacity of purpose beneath, which may well stand for our example. Like some pure glacier from an Alpine peak, it comes silently, slowly down into the valley; and though to the eye it seems not to move, it presses on with a force sublime in its silence and gigantic in its gentleness, and buries beneath it the rocks that stand in its way. The patience of Christ is the very sublimity of persistence in well-doing. It is our example, and more than our example—it is His gift to us.

Such passive and active patience is the direct fruit of love to God. The one chamber opens into the other. For they whose hearts dwell in the sweet sanctities of the love of God will ever be those who say, with a calm smile, as they put out their hand to the bitterest draught, "the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Love, and evil dwindles; love, and duty becomes supreme; and in the submission of the will, which is the true issue of love, lies the foundation of indomitable and inexhaustible endurance and perseverance.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, that in this resolve to do the will of God, in spite of all antagon-

ism and opposition, lies a condition at once of moral perfection and of blessedness. So, dear friends, if we would have a home for our hearts, let us pass into that sweet, calm, inexpugnable fortress provided for us in the love of God and the patience of Christ.

II.—Now notice, secondly, the Guide of the heart to its home.

"The Lord direct you." I have already explained that we have here a distinct address to Jesus Christ as Divine, and the Hearer of prayer. The Apostle evidently expects a present, personal influence from Christ to be exerted upon men's hearts. And this is the point to which I desire to draw your attention in a word or two. We are far too oblivious of the present influence of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, upon the hearts of men that trust Him. We have very imperfectly apprehended our privileges as Christians if our faith do not expect, and if our experience have not realized, the inward guidance of Christ moment by moment in our daily lives. I believe that much of the present feebleness of the Christian life amongst its professors is to be traced to the fact that their thoughts about Jesus Christ are predominantly thoughts of what He did nineteen centuries ago, and that the proportion of faith is not observed in their perspective of His work, and that they do not sufficiently realize that to-day, here, in you and me, if we have faith in Him, He is verily and really putting forth His power.

Paul's prayer is but an echo of Christ's promise. The Master said, "He shall guide you into all truth." The servant prays, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." And if we rightly know the whole

blessedness that is ours in the gift of Jesus Christ, we shall recognize His present guidance as a reality in our lives.

That guidance is given to us mainly by the Divine Spirit laying upon our hearts the great facts which evoke our answering love to God. "We love Him because He first loved us"; and the way by which Jesus directs our hearts into the love of God is mainly by shedding abroad God's love to us in our spirits by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.

But, besides that, all these movements in our hearts, so often neglected, so often resisted, by which we are impelled to a holier life, to a deeper love, to a more unworldly consecration—all these, rightly understood, are Christ's directions. He leads us, though often we know not the hand that guides, and every Christian may be sure of this—and he is sinful if he does not live up to the height of his privileges—that the ancient promises are more than fulfilled in his experience, and that he has a present Christ, an in-dwelling Christ, who will be his Shepherd, and lead him by green pastures and still waters sometimes, and through valleys of darkness and rough defiles sometimes, but always with the purpose of bringing him nearer and nearer to the full possession of the love of God and the patience of Christ.

The vision which shone before the eyes of the father of the forerunner, was that the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to "guide our feet into the way of peace." It is fulfilled in Jesus, who directs our hearts into love and patience, which are the way of peace.

We are not to look for impressions and impulses

distinguishable from the operations of our own inward man. We are not to fall into the error of supposing that a conviction of duty or a conception of truth is of Divine origin because it is strong. But the true test of their Divine origin is their correspondence with the written word, the standard of truth and life. Jesus guides us to a fuller apprehension of the great facts of the infinite love of God in the Cross. Shedding abroad a Saviour's love does kindle ours.

III.—Lastly, notice the heart's yielding to its Guide.

If this was Paul's prayer for his converts, it should be our aim for ourselves. Christ is ready to direct our hearts, if we will let Him. All depends on our yielding to that sweet direction, loving as that of a mother's hand on her child's shoulder.

What is our duty and wisdom in view of these truths? The answer may be thrown into the shape of one or two brief counsels.

First, desire it. Do you Christian people want to be led to love God more? Are you ready to love the world less, which you will have to do if you love God more? Do you wish Christ to lay His hand upon you, and withdraw you from much, that He may draw you into the sanctities and sublimities of His own experienced love? I do not think the lives of some of us look very like as if we should welcome that direction. And it is a sharp test, and a hard commandment to say to a Christian professor, "Desire to be led into the love of God."

Again, expect it. Do not dismiss all that I have been saying about a present Christ leading men by their own impulses, which are His monitions, as fanatical and mystical and far away from daily experi-

ence. Ah! it is not only the boy Samuel whose infancy was an excuse for his ignorance, who takes God's voice to be only white-bearded Eli's. There are many of us who, when Christ speaks, think it is only a human voice. Perhaps His deep and gentle tones are thrilling through my harsh and feeble one; and He is now, even by the poor reed through which He breathes His breath, saying to some of you, "Come near to Me." Expect the guidance.

Still your own wills that you may hear His voice. How can you be led if you never look at the Guide? How can you hear that still small voice amidst the clattering of spindles, and the roar of wagons, and the noises in your own heart? Be still, and He will speak.

Follow the guidance, and at once, for delay is fatal. Like a man walking behind a guide across some morass, set your feet in the prints of the Master's and keep close at His heels, and then you will be safe. And so, dear friends, if we want to have anchorage for our love, let us set our love on God, who alone is worthy of it, and who alone of all its objects will neither fail us nor change. If we would have the temper which lifts us above the ills of life and enables us to keep our course unaffected by them all, as the gentle moon moves with the same silent, equable pace through piled masses of cloud and clear stretches of sky, we must attain submission through love, and gain unreluctant endurance and steadfast wills from the example and source of both, the gentle and strong Christ. If we would have our hearts calm, we must let Him guide them, sway them, curb their vagrancies, stimulate their desires, and satisfy the desires which

He has stimulated. We must abandon self, and say, "Lord, I cannot guide myself. Do Thou direct my wandering feet." The prayer will not be in vain. He will guide us with His eye, and that directing of our hearts will issue in experiences of love and patience, whose "very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality." The Guide and the road foreshadow the goal. The only natural end to which such a path can lead and such guidance point is a heaven of perfect love, where patience has done its perfect work, and is called for no more. The experience of present direction strengthens the hope of future perfection. So we may take for our own the triumphant confidence of the Psalmist, and embrace the nearest and the remotest future in one calm vision of faith that "Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."

IV.

The Lord of Peace and the Peace of the Lord.

"Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace always, by all means. The Lord be with you all."—2 THESS. iii. 16.

WE have reached here the last of the brief outbursts of prayer which characterize this letter, and bear witness to the Apostle's affection for his Thessalonian converts. It is the deepening of the ordinary Jewish formula of meeting and parting. We find that, in most of his letters, the Apostle begins with wishing "grace and peace," and closes with an echo of the wish. "Peace be unto you" was often a form which meant nothing. But true religion turns conventional insincerities into real, heartfelt desires. It was often a wish destined to remain unfulfilled. But loving wishes are potent when they are changed into petitions.

The relation between the two clauses of my text seems to be that the second, "The Lord be with you all," is not so much a separate, additional supplication as rather the fuller statement, in the form of prayer, of the means by which the former supplication is to

be accomplished. "The Lord of Peace" gives peace by giving His own presence. This, then, is the supreme desire of the Apostle, that Christ may be with them all, and in His presence they may find the secret of tranquillity.

I.—The deepest longing of every human soul is for peace.

There are many ways in which the supreme good may be represented, but perhaps none of them is so lovely, and exercises such universal fascination of attraction, as that which presents it in the form of rest. It is an eloquent testimony to the unrest which tortures every heart that the promise of peace should to all seem so fair. It may be presented and aimed at in very ignoble and selfish ways. It may be sought for in cowardly shirking of duty, in sluggish avoidance of effort, in selfish absorption, apart from all the miseries of mankind. It may be sought for in the ignoble paths of mere pleasure, amidst the sanctities of human love, amidst the nobilities of intellectual effort and pursuit. But all men in all their workings are aiming at rest of spirit, and only in such rest does blessedness lie. "There is no joy but calm." It is better than all the excitements of conflict, and better than the flush of victory. Rest which is not apathy, rest which is not indolence, rest which is contemporaneous with, and the consequence of, the full wholesome activity of the whole nature in its legitimate directions, that is the thing that we are all longing for. The sea is not stagnant, though it be calm. There will be the slow heave of the calm billow, and the wavelets may sparkle in the sunlight, though they be still from all

the winds that rave. Deep in every human heart, in yours and mine, brother, is this cry for rest and peace. Let us see to it that we do not mistranslate the meaning of the longing, or fancy that it can be found in the ignoble, the selfish, the worldly ways to which I have referred. We want, most of all, peace in our inmost hearts.

II.—Then the second thing to be suggested here is that the Lord of Peace Himself is the only Giver of Peace.

I suppose I may take for granted, on the part at least of the members of my own congregation, some remembrance of a former discourse upon another of these petitions, in which I pointed out how, in phraseology analogous to that of my text, there were the distinct reference to the divinity of Jesus Christ, the distinct presentation of prayer to Him, the implication of His present activity upon Christian hearts.

And here again we have the august and majestic "Himself." Here again we have the distinct reference of the title "Lord" to Jesus. And here again we have plainly prayer to Him.

But the title by which He is addressed is profoundly significant, "The Lord of Peace." Now we find, in another of Paul's letters, in immediate conjunction with His teaching, that casting all our care upon God is the sure way to bring the peace of God into our hearts, the title "the God of Peace"; and he employs the same phraseology in another of his letters, when he prays that the "God of Peace" would fill the Roman Christians "with all joy and peace in believing."

So, then, here is a title which is all but distinctively Divine. "The *Lord* of Peace" is brought into parallelism and equality with "the God of Peace"; which were blasphemy unless the underlying implication was that Jesus Christ Himself was Divine.

He is the "Lord of Peace" because that tranquillity of heart and spirit, that unruffled calm which we all see from afar, and long to possess, was verily His, in His Manhood, during all the calamities and changes and activities of His earthly life. I have said that "peace" is not apathy, that it is not indifference, that it is not self-absorption. Look at the life of the "Lord of Peace." In Him there were wholesome human emotions. He sorrowed, He wept, He wondered, He was angry, He pitied, He loved. And yet all these were perfectly consistent with the unruffled calm which marked His whole career. So peace is not stolid indifference, nor is it to be found in the avoidance of difficult duties, or the cowardly shirking of sacrifices and pains and struggles; but rather it is "peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation," of which the great Example stands in Him who was "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," and who yet, in it all, was "the Lord of Peace."

Why was Christ's Manhood so perfectly tranquil? The secret lies here. It was a Manhood in unbroken communion with the Father. And what was the secret of that unbroken communion with the Father? It lies here, in the perfect submission of His will. Resignation is peace. The surrender of self-will is peace. Obedience is peace. Trust is peace. And fellowship with the Divine is peace. So Christ has taught us in His life. "The Father hath not left Me

alone, because I do always the things that please Him." And therein He has marked out for us the path of righteousness and communion, which is ever the path of peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." That is the secret of the tranquillity of the ever-calm Christ.

Being thus the Lord of Peace, inasmuch as it was His own constant and unbroken possession, He is the sole Giver of it to others.

Ah! brethren, our hearts want far more, for their stable restfulness, than we can find in any hand, or in any heart, except those of Jesus Christ Himself. For what do we need? We need, in order that we should know the sweetness of repose, an adequate object for every part of our nature. If we find something that is good and sweet and satisfying for some portion of this complex being of ours, all its other hungry desires are apt to be left unappeased. So we are shuttlecocked from one wish to another, and bandied about from one partial satisfaction to another, and in them all it is but segments of our being that are satisfied, whilst all the rest of the circumference remains disquieted. We need that, in one attainable and single object, there shall be at once that which will subjugate the will, that which will illuminate and appease the conscience, that which will satisfy the seeking intellect, and hold forth the promise of endless progress in insight and knowledge, that which will meet all the desires of our ravenous clamant nature, and that which will fill every creek and cranny of our empty hearts as with the flashing brightness of an inflowing tide.

And where shall we find all these, but in One dear heart, and where shall we discern the one Object, whom, possessing, we have enough; and without whom, possessing all beside, we are mendicants and starving? Where, but in that dear Lord who Himself will supply all our needs, and will minister to us peace, because for will and conscience and intellect and affections and desires He supplies the pabulum that they require, and gives more than enough for their satisfaction?

We want, if we are to be at rest, that there shall be some absolute control over our passions, lusts, desires, which torture us for ever, as long as they are ungoverned. There is only one Hand which will take the wild beasts of our nature, bind them in the silken leash of His love, and lead them along, tamed and obedient.

We want, for our peace, that all our relations with circumstances and men around us shall be rectified. And who is there that can bring about such harmony between us and our surroundings that calamities shall not press upon us with their heaviest weight, nor opposing circumstances kindle angry resistance, but only patient perseverance and thankful persistence in the path of duty? It is only Christ that can regulate our relations to the things and the men around us, and make all things work together to our consciousness for our good.

Further, if we are to be at rest, and possess any true, fundamental, and stable tranquillity, we want that our relations with God shall consciously be rectified and made blessed. And I, for my part, do not believe that any man comes into the full sweetness

of an assured friendship with God, except he comes to it by the road of faith in that Saviour in whom God draws near to us with tenderness in His heart, and blessings dropping from His open hands. To be at peace with God is the beginning of all true tranquillity, and that can be secured only by faith in Jesus Christ.

So, because He brings the reconciliation between man and God, because He brings the rectification of our relation to circumstances and men, because He brings the control of desires and passions and inclinations, and because He satisfies all the capacities of our natures, in Him, and in Him only, is there peace for us.

III.—So note, thirdly, that the peace of the Lord of Peace is perfect.

"Give you peace always." That points to perpetual, unbroken duration in time, and through all changing circumstances which might threaten a less stable and deeply-rooted tranquillity. And then, "by all means," as our Authorized Version has it, or, better, "in all ways," as the Revised Version reads, the reference being, not so much to the various manners in which the Divine peace is to be bestowed, as to the various aspects which that peace is capable of assuming. Christ's peace, then, is perpetual and multiform, unbroken, and presenting itself in all the aspects in which tranquillity is possible for a human spirit.

It is possible, then, thinks Paul, that there shall be in our hearts a deep tranquillity, over which disasters, calamities, sorrows, losses, need have no power. There is no necessity why, when my outward life is troubled, my inward life should be perturbed. There may be

light in the dwellings of Goshen, while darkness lies over all the land of Egypt. The peace which Christ gives is no exemption from warfare, but is realized in the midst of warfare. It is no immunity from sorrows, but is then most felt when the storm of sorrow beating upon us is patiently accepted. The rainbow steadfastly stands spanning the tortured waters of the cataract. The fire may burn, like that old Greek fire, beneath the water. The surface may be agitated, but the centre may be calm. It is not calamity that breaks our peace, but it is the resistance of our wills to the calamity which troubles us. When we can bow and submit and say, "Thy will be done," "it seemeth good to Thee, do as Thou wilt," then nothing can break the peace of God in our hearts. We seek in the wrong quarter for peace when we seek it in the disposition of outward things according to our wills. We seek in the right way when we seek it in the disposition of our wills according to the will of the Father manifest in our circumstances. There may be peace always, even whilst the storms, efforts, and calamities of life are in full operation around us and on us. That peace may be uninterrupted and uniform, extended on one high level, as it were, through all our lives. It is not so with us, dear brethren; there are ups and downs which are our own fault. The peace of God may be permanent, but, in order that it should be, there must be permanent communion and permanent obedience.

Further, says the Apostle, Christ's peace will not manifest itself in one form only, but in all the shapes in which peace is possible. There are many enemies that beset this calmness of spirit; for them all there

is the appropriate armour and defence in the peace of God. I have already enumerated in part some of the requirements for true and permanent tranquillity of soul. All these are met in the peace of Christ. Whatever it is that disturbs men, He has His anodyne that will soothe. If circumstances threaten, if men array themselves against us, if our own evil hearts rise up in rebellion, if our passions disturb us, if our consciences accuse: for all these Christ brings tranquillity and calm. In every way in which men can be disturbed, and in every way, therefore, in which peace can be manifest, Christ's gift avails. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

IV.—Lastly, "the Lord of Peace" gives it by giving His own presence.

The Thessalonians, as they listened to Paul's first prayer, might think to themselves, "Always, in all ways. That is a large petition! Can it be fulfilled?" And so the Apostle adds, "The Lord be with you all." You cannot separate Christ's gifts from Christ. The only way to get anything that He gives is to get Him. It is His presence that does everything. If He is with me, the world's annoyances will seem very small. If I hold His hand I shall not be much troubled. If I can only nestle close to His side, and come under His cloak, He will shield me from the cold blast, from whatever part it blows. If my heart is twined around Him it will partake of the stability and calm of the great heart on which it rests.

The secret of tranquillity is the presence of Christ. When He is in the vessel the waves calm themselves. So, Christian men and women, if you and I are

conscious of breaches of our restfulness, interruptions of our tranquillity by reason of surging, impatient passions, and hot desires within ourselves, or by reason of the pressure of outward circumstances, or by reason of our having fallen beneath our consciences, and done wrong things, let us understand that the breaches of our peace are not owing to Him, but only to our having let go His hand. It is our own faults if we are ever troubled; if we kept close to Him we should not be. It is our own faults if the world ever agitates us beyond the measure that is compatible with central calm. Sorrow should not have the power to touch the citadel of our lives. Effort should not have the power to withdraw us from our trustful repose in Him. And nothing here would have the power, if we did not let our hands slip out of His, and break our communion with Him.

So, dear brethren, "in the world ye shall have tribulation, in Me ye shall have peace." Keep inside the fortress and nothing will disturb. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The only place where that hungry, passion-ridden heart of yours, conscious of alienation from God, can find rest, is close by Jesus Christ. "The Lord be with us all," and then the peace of that Lord shall clothe and fill our hearts in Christ Jesus.

V.

The Hope of the Calling.

"THAT ye may know what is the hope of his calling."—EPH. i. 18.

A MAN'S prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. What he asks for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and how he asks it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul's writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire, than in his petitions for his friends.

In that great prayer of which my text forms a part we have his response to the good news that had reached him of the steadfastness in faith and abundance in love of these Ephesian Christians. As the best expression of his glad love he asks for them the knowledge of three things, of which my text is the first, and the other two are the "riches of the glory of the inheritance" and "the exceeding greatness of God's power."

Now if we take the "hope" in my text, as is often done, as meaning the thing hoped for, there seems to be but a shadowy difference between the first and the second of these subjects of the apostolic petition. Whereas, if we take it as meaning, not the object on which the emotion is fixed, but the emotion itself, then all the three stand in a natural gradation and connection. We have, first, the Christian emotion; then the object upon which it is fixed: "the glory of the inheritance"; then the power by which the latter is bought and the former is realized. We shall consider the second and third of these petitions in subsequent sermons. For the present I confine myself to this first one, the Apostle's great desire for Christians who had already made considerable progress in the Christian life, "that they may know," by experiencing it, "what is the hope of His calling."

I.—Now the first thought that these words suggest to me is this, that the Christian hope is based upon the facts of Christian experience.

What does the Apostle mean by naming it "the hope of His calling"? He means this, that the great act of the Divine mercy revealed to us in the Gospel, by which God summons and invites men to Himself, will naturally produce in those who have yielded to it a hope of immortal and perfect life. Because God has called men, therefore the man who has yielded to the call may legitimately, and must, if he is to do his duty, cherish such a hope. It is clear enough that this is so, inasmuch as, unless there be a heaven of completeness for us who have yielded to the summons and obeyed the invitation of God in His Gospel, His whole procedure is enigmatical and bewildering; the

fact of the call is inexplicable; the cost of it is no less so. It was not worth while for God to make the world unless with respect to another which was to follow. It was still less worth His while to redeem the world if the results of that redemption, as they are exhibited here and now, and as they are capable of being exhibited in this present condition of things, are all that are to flow from it. It was not worth Christ's while to die, it was not worth God's while to send His Son, there was no sense and consistency in that great voice that echoes from heaven, calling us to love and serve Him, unless, beyond the jangling contradictions, and imperfect attainments, and foiled aspirations, and fragmentary faith, and broken services of earth, there be a region of completeness, where all that was tendency here shall have become effect; and all that was but in germ here, and sorely frostbitten by the ungenial climate, and shrivelled by the foul vapours in the atmosphere, shall blossom and bourgeon into eternal life. The Christian life, as it is to-day, in its attainments and imperfections, is at once the witness of the reality of the power that has produced it, and clamantly calls for a sphere and environment in which that power shall be able to produce the effects which it is capable of producing.

God is "not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent." Men begin grand designs which never get further than the paper that they are drawn on; or they build a porch, and then they are bankrupt, or change their minds, or die, and the palace remains unrealized, and all that pass by mock and say, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." But God's designs are certain of

accomplishment. The design that lies in the calling, unless we are to be reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion, and forego our belief in His veracity and resources to execute His designs, must needs lead on to the realm of perfectness. If we consider the agent by which it is effected, even the risen Christ; if we consider the cost at which it was accomplished, even the death on the Cross, the mission of His Son, and His assumption of the limitations of an incarnate life; if we consider the manifest potencies of the power that He has brought into operation in the present Christian life; and if we consider, side by side with these, the stark, staring contradictions and manifest inevitable limitations of the effects of that power, His calling carries in its depths the assurance that what He means shall be done, that Jesus Christ has not died in vain, that He has not ascended to fill a solitary throne, but is the Firstfruits of a great harvest; and that we shall one day be all that it is in the gospel of our salvation to make us, unhindered by the limitations and unthwarted by the antagonisms of this poor, human life of ours. Unless there be a heaven in which all desires shall be satisfied, all evils removed, all good perfected, all ragged trees made symmetrical and full-grown, and all souls that love Him radiant with His own perfect image, then the light that seemed a light from heaven is the most delusive of all the marsh-fires of earth, and nothing in the illusions of sense or of men's cunning is so cruel or so tragic as the calling that seemed to be the voice of God, and summoned us to a heaven which was only a dream.

II.—And so, secondly, notice how this hope of our

text is in some sense the very topstone of the Christian life.

Paul has heard concerning these people in Ephesus, of their faith and love. And because he has heard of these, therefore he offers this prayer. These two, the faith which apprehends the manifestations of God, in Jesus Christ, and the love which that faith produces in the heart that accepts the revelation of the infinite love, are crowned by, and are imperfect without, and naturally lead on to, the brightness of this great hope. Faith—the reliance of the spirit upon the veracity of the revealing God—gives hope its contents, for the Christian hope is not spun out of our own imaginations, nor is it the mere making objective in a future life of the unfulfilled desires of this disappointing present, but it is the recognition by the trusting spirit of the great and starry truths that are flashed upon it by the Word of God. Faith draws back the curtain, and hope gazes into the supernal abysses. My hope, if it be anything else than the veriest will-o'-the-wisp and delusion, is the answer of my heart to the revealed truth of God.

Similarly the love which flows from faith not only necessarily leads on to the expectation of union being perfected with the object of its warm affection, but also so works upon the heart and character as that the false and seducing loves which draw away, like some sluice upon a river, the current of life from its true channel, are all sanctified and no more hinder hope. Loving we hope for that which, unless we loved, would not draw desires nor yield foretastes of sweetness which, like perfumed oil, feed the pure flame of hope.

The triad of Christian graces is completed by Hope. Without her fair presence something is wanted to the completeness of her elder sisters. The great Campanile at Florence, though it be inlaid with glowing marbles and fair sculptures, and perfect in its beauty, wants the gilded skyward-pointing pinnacle of its topmost pyramid; and so it stands incomplete. And thus faith and love need for their crowning and completion the topmost grace that looks up to the sky and is sure of a mansion there.

Brethren, our Christianity is wofully imperfect unless faith and love find their acme, their upstretching completion, in this Christian hope. Do you seek to complete your faith and love by a living hope full of immortality?

III.—Thirdly, notice how this hope is an all-important element in the Christian life.

The Apostle asks for it as the best thing that can befall these Ephesian Christians, as the one thing that they need to make them strong and good and blessed. There are many other aspects of desire for them which appear in other parts of this letter. But here all Christian progress is regarded as being held in solution and included in vigorous hope.

Why is the activity of hope thus important for Christian life? Because it stimulates effort, calms sorrows, takes the fascination out of temptations, supplies a new aim for life and a new measure for the things of time and sense.

If we lived, as we ought to live, in the habitual apprehension of the great future awaiting all real Christians, would it not change the whole aspect of life? The world is very big when it is looked at from

any point upon its surface; but suppose it could be looked at from the central sun, how large would it appear then? We can shift our station in like fashion, and then we get the true measure at once of the insignificance and of the greatness of life. This world means nothing worthy, except as an introduction to another. Not that thereby there will follow in any wise man contempt for the present, for the very same reference to the future which dwarfs the greatnesses and dwindles the sorrows, and almost extinguishes the dazzling lights, of this present, does also lift it to its true significance and importance. It is the vestibule of that future, and that future is conditioned throughout by the results of the few years that we live here. An apprenticeship may be a very poor matter, looked at in itself; and the boy may say, What is the use of my working at all these trivial things? but if it is apprenticeship, it is worth while to attend to every trifle in its course, since attention to them will affect the standing of the man all his days.

Here and now we are getting ready for the great workshop yonder; learning the trick of the tools, and how to use our fingers and our powers, and when the schooling is done we shall be set to nobler work, and receive ample wages for the years here. Because that great "to-morrow will be as this day" of earthly life, "and much more abundant," therefore it is no trifle to work amongst the trifles; and nothing is small which may tell on our condition yonder. The least deflection from the straight line, however acute may be the angle which the divergent lines enclose at the starting, and however small may seem to be the deviation from the course, will, if prolonged to infinity, have room

between the two for all the stars, and the distance between them will be that the one is in heaven and the other is in hell. And so it is a great thing to live amongst the little things, and life gains its true significance when we dwarf and magnify it by linking it with the world to come.

If we only kept that hope bright before us, how little discomforts and sorrows and troubles would matter. Life would become "a solemn scorn of ills." It does not matter much what kind of cabin accommodation we have if we are only going a short voyage; the main thing is to make the port. If we, as Christian people, cherish, as we ought to do, this great hope, then we shall be able to control, and not to despise, but to exalt this fleeting and transient scene, because it is linked inseparably with the life that is to come.

IV.—Lastly, this hope needs enlightened eyes.

The Apostle prays that God may give these Ephesians "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," and then he adds, as the result of that gift, the desire that the Ephesian believers may have "the eyes of their hearts enlightened." That is a remarkable expression. It does not mean, as an English reader might suppose it to mean, that the affections are the agents by which this knowledge reaches us; but "heart" here is used, as it often is in Scripture, as a general expression for the whole inward life, and all that the Apostle means is that, by the gift of the Divine Spirit of wisdom, a man's inner nature may be so touched as to be capable of perceiving and grasping the "hope of the calling."

Observe, too, the language, "that ye may know the hope." How can you *know* a hope? How do you know any kind of feeling? By having it. The only way of knowing what is the hope is to hope, and this is only possible by dint of these eyes of the understanding being enlightened. For our inward nature, as we have it, and as we use it, without the touch of that Divine Spirit, is so engrossed with this present that the far-off blessedness to which my text refers has no chance of entering there. No man can look at something beside him with one eye, and at something half a mile off with the other. You have to focus the eye according to the object; and he that is gazing upon the near is thereby made blind to that which is afar off. If we go crawling along the low levels with our eyes upon the dust, then, of course, we cannot see the crown above.

We need more than the historical revelation of the light in order to enlighten the inward nature. There is many a man here now who knows all about the immortality that is brought to light by Jesus Christ just as well as the Christian man whose soul is full of the hope of it, and who yet, for all his knowledge, does not know the hope, because he has not felt it. You have to get further than to the acceptance intellectually of the historical facts of a risen and ascended Saviour before there can be in your heart any vital hope of immortality. The inward eye must be cleared and strengthened, cross lights must be shut out, so that we may direct the single eye of our hearts towards the great objects which alone are worthy of its fixed contemplation. And we cannot do that without a Divine help, that Spirit of wisdom which

will fill our hearts if we ask for it, which will fix our affections, which will clear our eyesight, which will withdraw it from seeing vanity as well as give it reality to see.

But we must observe the conditions. Since this clearness of hope comes not merely from the acceptance as a truth of the fact of Christ's resurrection and ascension, but comes through the gift of that Divine Spirit, then to have it you must ask for it. Christian people, do you ask for it? Do you ever pray—I do not mean in words, but in real desire—that God would help you to keep steadily before you that great future to which we are all going so fast? If you do you will get the answer. Seek for that Spirit; use it, and do not resist its touches. Do not fix your gaze on the world when God is trying to draw you to fix it upon Himself. Think more about Jesus Christ, more about God's high calling; live nearer to Him, and try more honestly, more earnestly, more prayerfully, more habitually, even amidst all the troubles and difficulties and trivialities of each day, to cultivate that great faculty of joyful and assured hope.

Surely God did not endue us with the power of hoping that we might fling it all away on trivial, transient things. We are all far too short-sighted. Our fault is, not that we do not hope, but that we hope for such near things, for such small things, like the old mariners who had no compass nor sextant, and were obliged to creep timidly along the coasts and steer from headland to headland. But we ought to launch boldly out into mid-ocean, knowing that we have before us that star that cannot guide us amiss.

Do not set your hopes on the things that perish, for if you do, hopes fulfilled and hopes disappointed will be equally bitter in your mouths. And you older people who, like myself, are drawing near the end of your days, and have little else left to hope for in this world, do you see to it that your anticipations extend "above the ruinable skies."

There *is* an object for hope, beyond experience, above imagination, without example, for which the creation wants a comparison, we an apprehension, and the Word of God itself a sufficient revelation. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God hath called us to His eternal kingdom and glory. Let us seek to walk in the light of the "hope of His calling."

VI.

God's Inheritance in the Saints.

"THAT ye may know what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."—EPH. i. 18.

THE misery of Hope is that it so often owes its materials to the strength of our desires or to the activity of our imagination. But when mere wishes or fancies spin the thread, Hope cannot weave a lasting fabric. And so one of the old prophets, in speaking of the delusive hopes of man, says that they are like "spiders' webs" and "shall not become garments." Paul, then, having been asking for these Ephesian Christians that they might have hopes lofty and worthy, and such as God's summons to them would inspire, passes on to ask that they might have the material out of which they could weave such hope—namely, a sure and clear knowledge of the future blessings. The language in which he describes that future is remarkable:—"The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." He calls it God's inheritance, not as meaning that God is the Inheritor, but the Giver. He speaks of it as "in the saints," meaning that, just as the land of Canaan was distributed amongst tribes and families, and each

man got his own little plot, so that broad land is parted out amongst those who are "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

And so my text suggests to me three points to which I seek to call your attention. First, the inheritance; second, the heirs; and, third, the heirs' present knowledge of their future possession.

I.—First, then, note the inheritance.

Now we must discharge from the word some of its ordinary associations. There is no reference to the thought of succession in it, as the mere English reader is accustomed to think, to whom inheritance means to succeed by the death of another. The idea is simply that of possession. The figure which underlies the word is, of course, that of the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes; but we must go a great deal deeper than that in order to understand its whole sweep and fulness of meaning.

What is the portion for a soul? God. God is Heaven, and Heaven is God. No interpretation of "the inheritance," however it may run out into cheap and vulgar sensuous descriptions of a future glory, has come within sight of the meaning of the word, unless it has grasped this as the central thought: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Only God can be the portion of a human spirit. And none else can fill the narrowest and the smallest of man's needs.

So, then, if there were realized all the accumulated changes of progress in blessedness, and the withdrawal of all external causes of disquiet and weariness and

weeping, still the heart would hunger and be empty of its true possession unless God Himself had flowed into it. It were but a poor advancement and the gain of a loss, if yearnings were made immortal, and the aching vacuity which haunts every soul that is parted from God were cursed with immortality. It would be so, if it be not true that the inheritance is nothing less than the fuller possession of God Himself.

And how do men possess God? How do we possess one another, here and now? By precisely the same way, only indefinitely expanded and exalted, do we possess Him here, and shall we possess Him hereafter. Heart to heart is joined by love which is mutual and interpenetrating possession; where "mine" and "thine" become blended, like the several portions of the one ray of white light, in the blessed word "ours." Contemplation makes us possessors of God. Assimilation to His character makes us own and have Him. They who love and gaze, and are being changed by still degrees into His likeness, possess Him. This is the central idea of man's future destiny and highest blessedness, a union with God closer and more intimate in degree, but yet essentially the same in kind, as is here possible amidst the shows and vanities and wearinesses of this mortal life. "His servants shall serve Him, and see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." Obedience, contemplation, transformation, these are the hands by which we here lay hold on God; and they in the heavens grasp Him, just as we here on earth may do. The "inheritance" is God Himself.

Surely that is in accordance with the whole teaching of Scripture, and is but the expansion of plain words

which tell us that we "are heirs of God." If that be so, then all the other subsidiary things which have been, to the sore detriment of Christian anticipation and of Christian life in a hundred ways, elevated into disproportionate importance, fall into their right places, and are more when they are looked upon as secondary than when they are looked upon as primary.

Ah! brethren, neither the sensuous metaphors which, in accommodation to our weakness, Scripture has used to paint that future so that we may, in some measure, comprehend it, nor the translation of these, in so far as they refer to circumstances and externals, are enough for us. It is blessed to know that "there shall be no night there"—blessed to grasp all those sweet negatives which contradict the miseries of the world, and to think of no sin, no curse, no tears, no sighing nor sorrow, neither any more pain, because the former things have passed away. It is sweet and ennobling to think that, when we are discharged of the load of this cumbrous flesh, we shall be much more ourselves, and able to see where now is but darkness, and to feel where now is but vacancy. It is blessed to think of the recognizing of lost and loved ones. But all these blessednesses, heaped together, as it seems to me, would become sickeningly the same if prolonged through eternity, unless we had God for our very own. *Eternal* is an awful word, even when the noun that goes with it is *blessedness.* And I know not how even the redeemed could be saved, as the long ages rolled on, from the oppression of monotony, and the feeling, "I would not live always," unless God was "the strength of their hearts

and their portion for ever." We must rise above everything that merely applies to changes in our own natures and in our relations to the external universe, and to other orders of creatures; and grasp, as the hidden sweetness that lies in the calyx of the gorgeous flower, the possession of God Himself as the rapture of our joy and the heaven of our heaven.

And, if that be so, then these accumulated words with which the Apostle, in his fiery, impetuous way, tries to set forth the greatness of what he is speaking about, receive a loftier meaning than they otherwise would have.

"The riches of the glory of His inheritance." Now that word "riches," or "wealth," is a favourite of His; and in this single letter occurs, if I count rightly, five times. In addition to our text it is used twice in connection with God's grace, "the riches of His grace"; once in connection with Jesus, "the unsearchable riches of Christ"; and once in a similar connection to, though with a different application from, our text, "the riches of His glory." Always, you see, it is applied to something that is special and properly Divine. And here, therefore, it applies, not to the abundance of any creatural good, however exuberant and inexhaustible the store of it may be, but simply and solely to that unwearying energy, that self-feeding and ever-burning and never-decaying light which is God. Of Him alone it can be said that work does not exhaust, nor Being tend to its own extinction, nor expenditure of resources to their diminution. The guarantee for eternal blessedness is the "riches" of the eternal God, and so we may be

sure that no time can exhaust, nor any expenditure empty, either His storehouse or our wealth.

And again, the "glory" is not the lustrous light, however dazzling to our feeble eyes that may be, of any creature that reflects the light of God, but it is the far-flashing and never-dying radiance of His own manifestation of Himself to the hearts and souls of them that love Him. And so the "inheritance is incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away"; not merely by reason of the communicated will of God operating upon creatures whom He preserves untarnished by corruption, and ungnawed by decay, but because He Himself is the "inheritance," and on Him time hath no power. On His wealth all His creatures may hang for ever; and it shall be as it was in the sweet parable of the miracle of old, the fragments that remain will be more than when the meal began. "The riches of the glory of His inheritance."

II.—Now, notice, secondly, the heirs.

The words of my text receive, perhaps, their best commentary and explanation in those words which the writer of them heard, on the Damascus road, when the voice from Heaven spoke to him about men "obtaining an inheritance among them that are sanctified." It almost sounds like an echo of the long past, but never-to-be-forgotten voice, when our Apostle writes as he does in our text.

Now what does he mean by "saints"? Who are these amongst whom the broad acres of that infinite prairie are to be parted out? The word has attracted to itself contemptuous meanings and ascetical meanings, and meanings which really deny the true democracy of Christianity, and the equality of all

believers in the sight of God. But its Scriptural use has none of these narrowing and confusing associations adhering to it, nor does it even directly and at first mean, as we generally take it to mean, pure men, holy in the sense of clean and righteous. But something goes before that phase of meaning, and it is this—a saint is a man separated and set apart for God, as His property. That is the true meaning of the word. It is its meaning as it is applied to the vessels of the Temple, the priests, the services, and the altar. It is its meaning, only with the necessary substitution of spirit for body, as it is applied in the New Testament as a designation co-extensive with that of believers.

How does a man belong to God?

We asked a minute or two ago how God belonged to men. The answer to the converse question is almost identical. A man belongs to God by the affection of his heart, by the submission of his will, by the reference of his actions to Him; and he who thus belongs to God, in the same act in which he gives himself to God, receives God as his possession. The relation must be reciprocal. "All mine is Thine." God answers, "And all Mine is thine." He ever meets our, "O, Lord, I yield myself to Thee," with His "And, My child, I give Myself to thee." It is so in regard of our earthly loves. It is so in regard of our relations to Him. And, that being the case, purity, which is generally taken by careless readers as being the main idea of sanctity, will follow this self-surrender, which is the basis of all goodness everywhere and always.

If that be true, and I do not think it can be denied

effectively, then the next step is a very plain one, and that is that for the perfect possession of God which is heaven, the same thing is needed in its perfection which is required for that partial possession of Him which makes the Christian life of earth. And, just as here we get Him for ours in proportion as we give up ourselves to be His, so yonder the inheritance belongs, and can only belong, to "the saints." So, then, one can see that there is nothing arbitrary in this limitation of a possession, which in its very nature cannot go beyond the bounds which are thus marked out for it. If heaven were the vulgar thing that some of us think it, if that future life were desirable simply because we escaped from some external punishment, and got all sorts of outward blessings and joys, felicities and advantages, hung round the neck, or pinned upon the breast, as they do on successful fighters, why then, of course, there might be partiality in the distribution of the decorations. But if that possession hinges upon our yielding ourselves to Him, then there is not an arbitrary link in the whole chain. Faith is set forth as the condition of heaven, because faith is the means of union with Christ, by and from Whom alone we draw the motives for self-surrender and the power for sanctity. You cannot have heaven unless you have God. That is step number one. You cannot have God unless you have "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." That is step number two. You cannot have holiness without faith. That is step number three. "An inheritance among them that are sanctified" can only be obtained "by faith which is in me."

It is clear, too, what a fatal delusion some of us are

under who think that we shall, and fancy that we should like to, as we say, "go to heaven when we die." Why! Heaven is here, round about you, a present heaven in the imitation of God, in the practice of righteousness, in the cultivation of dependence upon Him, in the yielding of yourselves up to Him. Heaven is here, and by your own choice you stop outside of it. There must be a correspondence between environment and nature for blessedness. "The mind is its own place," as the great Puritan poet taught us, "and makes a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." Fishes die on the shore, and the man that drew them out dies in the water. Gills cannot breathe where lungs are useful, and lungs cannot, where gills come into play. If you have not here and now the holiness which knits you to God, and gives you possession of Him, you would not like heaven, if it were possible to carry you to that place, in so far as it is a place. It is rather strange, if you hope to go to heaven when you die, that you should be very unwilling to spend a little time in it whilst you are alive, and that you should expect blessedness then from the presence of God which brings you no blessedness now.

III.—Lastly, we have here the heirs' present knowledge of their future blessedness.

The Apostle asks that these men may know a thing that clearly seems unknowable. It is an impossible petition, we might be ready to say, because it is clear enough that there can be no true knowledge of the conditions and details of that future life The dark mountains that lie between us and it hide their secret well, and few or no stray beams have

reached us. An unborn babe, or a chrysalis in a hole in the ground or in a chink of a tree, might think as wisely about their future condition as we can do about that life beyond. There can be no knowledge until there is experience.

What, then, does Paul mean by offering such a petition as this? The answer is found in noticing that the knowledge which he is imploring here is a consequence of a previous knowledge. For, in a former verse, he prays that these men may have "the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of God"; and when they have got the knowledge of God he thinks that they will have got the "knowledge of the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Now, turn that into other words, and it is just this, that the knowledge of God, which comes by faith and love here, is in kind so identical with the fullest and loftiest riches of the knowledge of Him hereafter, that, if we know the one, we are not ignorant of the other. The one is in germ, the other, no doubt, full blown; the one is the twinkling of the rushlight as it were, the other is the blaze of the sunshine. The two states of being are so correspondent that from the one we draw our clearest knowledge of the other. Men make telescopes, using which you do not look up when you want to see the stars, but down on to a reflecting mirror, and there you see them. Such a reflecting mirror, though it be sometimes muddied and dimmed and always very small, are the experiences of the Christian soul here.

So, dear friends, if we want to know as much as may be known of the blessedness of heaven, let us seek to possess as much as may be possessed of the

knowledge and love of God on earth. Then we shall know the centre, at any rate; and that is light, though the circumference may be very dark. Much will remain obscure. That is of very small consequence to Hope, which does not need information half as much as it needs assurance. Like some flower in a cranny of a rock, it can spread a broad bright blossom on little soil, if only it be firmly rooted.

The path for us all is plain. Come to Jesus Christ as sinful men, and take what He has given, who has given Himself for us. Touched by His love, let us love Him back again, and yield ourselves to Him, and He will give Himself to us. They who can say "O Lord! I am Thine," are sure to hear from Heaven, "I am thine." And they who possess, in being possessed by, God Himself do not need to die in order to go to heaven, but are at least doorkeepers in the house of the Lord now, and stand where they can see into the inner sanctuary which they will one day tread. A life of faith brings heaven to us, and thereby gives us the surest and the clearest knowledge of what we shall be, and have, when we are brought to heaven.

VII.

The Measure of Immeasurable Power.

"THAT ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ."—EPH. i. 19, 20.

"THE riches of the glory of the inheritance" will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt—"and can *I* ever hope to reach it?" Our paths are strewn with battlefields where we were defeated; how should we expect the victor's wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends in Ephesus need when he has asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfil the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that worketh in us. It is "exceeding." Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this

letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, may help us to supply the missing words. He speaks of the "love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and of God being "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." The power which is really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. "According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ." Is that heaping together of synonyms, or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words, in that the first of them is the more active and outward, and the last of them is the more inward. And so they liken them to fruit and branch and root; but we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable; and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is his wont, is swept away by the ardour of his faith and the clearness of his vision, and breaks from his purpose to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself this morning to the words which I have read as my text, with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

I.—So, then, I ask you to look, first, at the measure and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christian men.

"According to the working of the strength of the might which he wrought in Christ." The Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens —these are the things which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-work, the *chef-d'œuvre* of the power that is operating in all Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a man, and that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, the members and their Head,

the Christ and His Church, are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatsoever the one is, there and that must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears, and consciousness of my own weakness, creep across me, and all my hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and think that He, in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness, is not only the pattern of what humanity may be, but the pledge of what His Church must be. "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." "The glory that Thou gavest Me I have given them."

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that worketh in us, but as this same letter teaches us, we have, as Christians, a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of his Lord, which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, "And you hath He quickened," and then, catching it up a verse or two afterwards, reiterates clause by clause what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power hath "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye-and-heart-filling glories of the ascended Christ give us the

measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives are concerned, and the scope and the aim of them, "in the heavens," and "sit with Him in heavenly places"—these things afford us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords; and because He who is our Life "is exalted high above all principalities and powers"; and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin, and has drawn us so near to Himself that if we are His we truly live beside Him, even whilst we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

II.—Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.

We have already come across the same apparent paradox, covering a deep truth, in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture, but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience, and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object.

How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath

its force. How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness, and lifts us buoyant above our temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits should be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which wrought in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions, but that we should have the vital knowledge which is, and which comes from, life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure; though it be, in its depth and fulness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly discovered country to be sure of its existence, and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores. And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God, and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience, we have such a certified acquaintance with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted, and to become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through

the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view, and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass, but yet it *is* the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passeth knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of and constant reference to the measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy, Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said, "Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour, and hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands." And hundreds of years afterwards the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus, "We see not yet all things put under Him." Was the old vision a dream, was it ever intended to be fulfilled? Apparently not, if we take the history of the past into account; and the centuries that have passed since the Epistle have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will rise to the height which the Psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery; when we look on the world as

it is to-day, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the "working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ." "We see not yet all things put under Him." Be it so, "but we see Jesus," and looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above him. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there. We try, and we slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff and say, "We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below"? Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! A mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us and lifts us and sets us there.

"No man hath ascended up into Heaven save He that came down from Heaven," and having returned thither, stoops thence, and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition, when we think of such force at our disposal, and so

poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, should teach us to expect great things of God, and to be intolerant of present attainments, whilst anything remains unattained. And it should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better, if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realize the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that He is strong in might, not one faileth." That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the Divine power. It is great to preserve the ancient heavens fresh and strong by His might, but it is greater to come down to my weakness, to "give power to the faint," and "increase strength to them that have no might." And that is what He will do with us.

III.—Lastly, notice the conditions for the operation of the power.

"To usward who believe," says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians, and saying "ye," but now, by that "us," he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them; and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

"To usward who believe." Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain, that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of

the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort.

How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father, who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one, and if you have only a thimble in your hand you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power; the one is that infinite limit of "the power which He wrought in Christ," and the other the practical limit—the working bound of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible to ourselves, and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? And if, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two, that barely refresh our parched lips, and do nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose

fault is that? The practical measure of our power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him as I pray we all may, and continue there, and ask from Him strength, according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, "According to your faith be it unto you."

VIII.

The Great Pleas of a Great Prayer.

"THE God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant."—HEB. xiii. 20.

"THE Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." So says the Psalmist, meaning, I suppose, by the "running" of the "righteous into" the "Name," the flight of the soul from earthly vanities to the contemplation of the revealed character of God as the foundation of its desires and petitions. "The Name of the Lord" is the basis of prayer. What He is, in so far as is known by what He has said and done, is at once the foundation and the limit of what we can ask of Him. "For Thy Name's sake," which is in substance identical with "for Christ's sake," is the prevailing plea with God.

So here, the writer, being about to ask no small gift from the Divine hand, even nothing less than the absolute perfecting of these Hebrew Christians for every good work, so as to be pleasing in His sight, heartens himself for the wide and seemingly impossible petition by gazing on God. And these

designations of Him, in His nature, His work of raising Jesus Christ from the dead, and His covenant, by which He has obliged Himself to a certain course of action, are at once the suppliant's arguments with God to give, and with himself to expect. If we laid more to heart what "the Name of the Lord" holds, we should put all doubt far from us and be ashamed of our inadequate and limiting expectations, and of the coldness and faithlessness of our petitions.

So, paying no attention for the present to the substance of the petitions, which will afford us a ground for meditation upon a future occasion, we may look simply at the great revelation made here to us of what God is in Himself and in His acts, as heartening us to expect and to ask great things from Him.

I.—First, then, the Name of God is the warrant for our largest hope.

"The God of peace," says the writer, " . . . make you perfect in every good work, to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight." He *will* do it, is the implication of the appeal just because He is "the God of peace."

Now it seems to me that if we rightly grasp the significance and grand sweep of the words before us, we shall never rest content with such superficial exposition of them as supposes that by "the God of peace" is meant nothing more or deeper, nothing grander or higher, than the Author of concord between man and man. The phrase includes that, of course; as it includes other possible applications; but in its essence it goes a great deal deeper than that, and lays hold upon this aspect of the Divine

Nature as being the guarantee for every poor humble soul that draws near to Him that it shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and led into a tranquillity which is only possible when all unrighteousness is swept away. God is the God of peace, and, therefore, He will, if we will let Him, make us perfect unto every good work.

That, of course, must imply that the peace which is here ascribed to Him, as its source and fontal possessor, is that deep and changeless calm of an infinite and perfectly harmonious being which is broken by no work, perturbed by no agitations, and yet is no more stagnant than the calm depths of the ocean, being penetrated for ever by warmth and majestic motion in which there is rest.

"The God of peace" wills to give to men something not altogether unlike the tranquillity which He Himself possesses.

The hope seems altogether beyond the conditions of creatural life, which is tossed to and fro amidst changes and agitations. How can the finite, whose very law of life is change, whose nature is open to the disturbances of external solicitations, and the agitations of inward emotions—how can he ever, in this respect, approximate to the repose of God? And yet, analogous, if not similar, tranquillity may fill our hearts. Surely He who dwells in His own indisturbance, and desires that His children should be partakers of His stable blessedness, is able, as well as willing, to steady the soul that is knit to Him with somewhat of His own steadiness and calm.

For what is it that breaks human peace? Is it emotion, change or any of the necessary conditions of

our earthly life? By no means. It is possible to carry an unflickering flame through the wildest tempests, if only there be a sheltering hand round about it. And it is possible that my agitated and tremulous nature, blown upon by all the winds of heaven, may still burn straight upwards, undeviating from its steady aspiration, if only the hand of the Lord be about me. Just because God is the God of peace, it must be His desire to impart His own tranquillity to us.

The sure way by which that deep calm within the breast can be received and retained is by His imparting to us just what the writer here asks for these Hebrews—hearts ready for every good work and wills submitted to His will. The condition of peace is righteousness, and He who comes to make men partakers of the peace of God is, "first of all, King of Righteousness, and, after that, also King of Peace." When our wills are made pliable and flexible, no longer stiff and rigid and obstinate, like a bar of iron, to His touch, but bendable like a piece of dressed leather; when our hankering desires no longer go after forbidden dainties, but keep themselves within the limits of the Divine will; when we are ready for all that He commands or appoints, meeting the one with unmurmuring resignation and the other with unquestioning obedience—then nothing that is at enmity with joy can utterly abolish or destroy the peace that we have in God.

We have sought for rest; we have not found it if we have not learned the deep wisdom that lies in, as well as the soaring hopes that we are encouraged to cherish from, this collocation of my text. "The God

of peace make you perfect in every good work, to do His will." Then the peace which comes from unbroken friendship with Him, and that which comes from the inner harmony of a soul united to itself, and that which comes from independence of, and mastery over, circumstances, and that which comes from loving and unselfish relations to our fellows, will all be granted to us, and the great truth will be fulfilled in our hearts, "Great peace have they which love Thy law." It is because God is the God of peace that we may open our mouths wide, knowing that He will fill them, and dare ask that "the very God of peace may sanctify us wholly."

II.—Then note, secondly, how the raising of the Shepherd is the prophecy for the sheep. "The God that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep."

There is a reference here to, and I think a verbal quotation of, the words of the prophet Isaiah. "Where is He that brought them up out of the sea; with the Shepherd of His flock?" The allusive glance at the history of Moses and Israel is instructive and significant. Just as that former leader was brought up from the harmless, curling crests of the Red Sea waves, which drowned the oppressors and introduced the fugitives into the land of liberty, so Christ, at the head of those who love Him and trust Him, has passed through the cloven waters and has issued forth into the freedom and glory beyond.

While all sweet and blessed familiar applications of the metaphor are also to be kept in view, such as guidance and tender care and companionship and pasturage, and so on, yet the principal thought

implied here is that where the Shepherd goes the sheep follow. Christ's Resurrection and session in glory at the right hand of God point the path and the goal for all His servants.

It is a remarkable fact that, whilst there is no book of the New Testament which speaks so fully and emphatically and often as this one does of the risen glory of Jesus Christ, as King and Priest within the veil, and Forerunner for us, this is the only allusion in it to the Resurrection. And even this allusion does not so much emphasize the fact of resurrection as the state into which the risen Christ has passed for us, as our Forerunner. These two things, the Resurrection and the Ascension, are but two stages in one process, which has for its issue the celestial glory of the enthroned Christ.

I need not dwell upon the fact of the Resurrection as being for us the one manifest and irrefragable proof of a future life. I confess for my own part that if I did not believe that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, I could nowhere find an argument solid enough on which to rest the weight of indubitable certainty of a future life. No doubt there are many confirmatory considerations to be drawn from other sources, both internal and external. We may say that we need to have another life brought into the field of view in order to redress the inequalities, and explain some of the mysteries and problems of the present. We may say that consciousness seems to point in that direction, whatever may be the value of its witness as to the future. But whilst all these may be subsidiary evidences, there is but one thing that *proves* it. A fact can only be proved by a fact.

Jesus Christ died and rose again. Believing that, a man can say, I *know:* doubting or disbelieving it, he can only say, as the mood may take him, I *hope* or *fear.*

But the main consideration enforced by this designation of God as having brought the Shepherd from the dead is the guarantee thereby given that all the flock will be gathered round Him where He is, and will share in what He is. This same epistle puts a similar thought in its grand commentary on the ideal of manhood in Psalm viii.—"We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus"; and that is enough. I ask myself, Is it possible that I shall be delivered from this burden of corruption; that I shall ever, in any state, be able, with unhesitating and total surrender of myself, to make the will of God the very life of my spirit and the bread on which I live? And all the unbelieving, doubtful, and cowardly suggestions of my own heart as to the folly of trying after an unreachable perfection, and the wisdom of acquiescence in the partial condition to which I have already attained, are shivered and swept out of view by this one thing—the sight of a man throned by the side of God, perfect in holiness and serene in untroubled beauty. That is a prophecy for us all. We look out upon the world, or into this cage of evils in our own hearts, and are tempted to fold our hands and acquiesce in the inevitable. Alas! it is too true that "we see not yet all things put under man." Courage! my brethren. Nothing less than the likeness of Jesus Christ corresponds to God's will concerning us. In Him there is power to make each of us as pure, as sinless, as the Lord Himself in whom we

trust. He rose, and sits crowned with glory and honour. Oh! if Christian men would ponder what of hope and cheer, what of absolute certainty as to their own future, lie in that great fact, they would fight the good fight with far more buoyancy of spirit, and the expectation of conquering would more frequently fulfil itself, and we should know within ourselves "what is the exceeding greatness of His power according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him on His own right hand in the heavenly places." "The God that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep," has pledged Himself thereby that the sheep, who imperfectly follow Him here when He goeth before them, shall find Him gone before them into the heavens, and there will "follow Him whithersoever He goeth," in the perfect likeness and perfect purity of the perfect kingdom.

III.—Lastly, the everlasting covenant is the teacher and the pledge of our largest desires.

I am not going to enter upon questions difficult in themselves, and which have no special bearing on my present purpose, as to the connection of the last clause of my text with the preceding ones; as to whether we are to suppose that the writer meant that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in or by virtue of the blood of the everlasting Covenant, which would mean that His death, sealing God's covenant with us, was declared to be the sufficient guarantee and seal thereof by the fact of His Resurrection; or whether we are only to apply the words to the last part of the preceding clause, and to suppose that the meaning is

that Christ, by virtue of His death, becomes fully the Shepherd of the sheep. These questions we may leave on one side.

What I now seek to do is to bring clearly before our minds this thought of God as having entered into a covenant with us men, which is sealed for us in the death of Christ; and declared to be valid by His Resurrection.

It is not fashionable in modern theology to talk about God's covenant with us. Our forefathers used to have a great deal to say about it, and it became a technical word with them. And so this generation has very little to say about it, and seldom thinks of the great ideas that are contained in it. But is it not a grand thought, and a profoundly true one, that God, like some great monarch who deigns to grant a constitution to his people, has condescended to lay down conditions by which He will be bound, and on which we may reckon? Out of the illimitable possibilities of action, limited only by His own nature, and all incapable of being foretold by us, He has marked a track on which He will go. If I may so say, across the great ocean of possible action He has buoyed out His course, and we may prick it down upon our charts, and be quite sure that we shall find Him there.

What is the substance of these obligations which He has bound Himself by solemn utterances of His own faithful lips to fulfil to each of us?

"This is the Covenant," said a prophet, long before the date of this letter, to whom this writer stretches out a hand across the ages, greeting him as a brother—"this is the covenant that I will make with the house

of Israel—I will put My laws into their minds, and on their hearts will I write them, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people . . . all shall know Me . . . and their sins will I remember no more."

The moulding of heart and will to love His will, so making duty delight, is exactly the substance of this parting prayer, and it is the first article in the everlasting Covenant. With such inward conformity of will comes necessarily blessed mutual possession, God belonging to the obedient will and loving heart, which belong to and delight in Him. Such a heart will be illuminated with that knowledge which can only be won by possession. And the root of all lies in that final article which is adduced as necessarily presupposed in the others, "*for* . . . their sins will I remember no more." And how do we know that these great promises will be fulfilled? The blood of Jesus is the seal of the Covenant. Jesus has died; therefore sin is forgiven. Jesus Christ has died, therefore our natures will be filled with a Divine Spirit if we will, which shall make His law our delight, and His will ours. Jesus Christ has died, therefore the times of the ignorance are passed; and all men that will look at Him may know the Father. Jesus has died, therefore God is to us our God, and we are to Him His people.

That being the Covenant, how can we expect too confidently, or ask too beseechingly, or wait for the answer too assuredly, or aim too hopefully and buoyantly, at the fulfilment thereof? How can we limit our petitions and desires far within the broad boundaries which God has staked out for us? Be

sure of this, that within the four corners of God's articulate and unmistakable assurance lies all that heart can wish or spirit receive from Him. You cannot expect or ask more from Him than He has bound Himself to impart. Your desires can never be so outstretched as to go beyond the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ; and through the ages of time or eternity the everlasting Covenant remains, to which it shall be our wisdom and our blessedness to widen our hopes, expand our desires, conform our wishes, and adapt our work.

It is no vain dream that we may be stainless as the angels of God. The name of God, the glory of the risen Christ, the steadfastness of the everlasting Covenant, all combine to make it as certain as God Himself that if we will cleave to that Lord, and follow the footsteps of the Shepherd, we shall attain to the place where He is, and partake in the serenity of His rest, and the lustre of His glory.

IX.

The Great Prayer based on Great Pleas.

"MAKE you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ."—HEB. xiii. 21.

MASSIVE foundations prognosticate a great building. We do not dig deep, and lay large blocks, in order to rear some flimsy structure. We have seen, in the previous sermon, how the words preceding my text bring out certain great aspects of the Divine character and work, and now we have to turn to the great prayer which is based upon these. It is a prophecy as well as a prayer; for such a contemplation of what God is and does makes certain the fulfilment of the desires which the contemplation excites. Small petitions to a great God are insults. He is "the God of peace," therefore we may ask Him to "make us perfect," and be sure that He will. He is the God "that brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep," therefore we may ask Him and be sure. He is the God who has sealed an "everlasting covenant" with us by the blood of the Shepherd, therefore we may ask Him and be sure.

This prayer is the parting highest wish of the

writer for his friends. Do our desires for ourselves, and for those whom we would seek to bless, run in the same mould? How strange it is that Christian people, who believe in the God whom the previous verse sets before us, so imperfectly and languidly cherish the confidence which inspires desires, for themselves and their brethren, such as those of our text this morning! Let us look at these great petitions, then, in the light of the great Name on which they are based.

I.—And, first, I ask you to consider the prayer which the Name excites.

"Make you perfect in every good work." Now, I need only observe here, in regard to the language of the petition, that the word translated "make perfect" is not the ordinary one employed for that idea, but a somewhat remarkable one, with a very rich and pregnant variety of significance. For instance, it is employed to describe the action of the fisherman apostles in *mending* their nets. It is employed to describe the Divine action which "by faith we understand" when He "*made* the worlds." It is employed to describe the action which the Apostle commends to one of his churches when he bids them "*restore* such an one in the spirit of meekness." It is the condition which he described when he desired another of his churches to be "perfectly *joined together*, in one mind and in one judgment." It is still again the expression employed when he speaks of "*filling up*," or "perfecting that which is lacking in their faith." The general idea of the word, then, is to make sound, or fit, or complete, by *restoring*, by *mending*, by *filling up* what is lacking, and by *adapting* all together in

harmonious co-operation. And so this is what Christians ought to look for, and to desire, as being the will of God concerning them. The writer goes on to still further deepen the idea when he says, "make you perfect in every good work"; where the word *work* is a supplement, and unnecessarily limits the idea of the text. For that applies much rather to character than to work, and the "make you perfect in every good" refers rather to an inward process than to any outward manifestation. And this character, thus harmonized, corrected, restored, filled up where it is lacking, and that in regard of all manner of good—"whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and of good report"—that character is "well-pleasing to God."

So, brethren, you see the width of the hopes—ay! of the confidence—that you and I ought to cherish. We should expect that all the discord of our nature shall be changed into a harmonious co-operation of all its parts towards one great end. We bear about within us a warning anarchy and tumultuous chaos, where solid and fluid, warm and cold, light and dark, calm and storm, contend. Is there any power that can harmonize this divided nature of ours, where lusts and passions, and inclinations of all sorts, drag one away, and duty draws another, so as that a man is torn apart as it were by wild horses? There is one. "The worlds" were harmonized, adapted, and framed together, and chaos turned into order and beauty, and the God of peace will come and do that for us, if we will let Him, so that the long schism which affects our natures, and makes us say sometimes, "I find a law in my members warring against the law of my

mind," "Oh! wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" may be changed into perfect harmony, and the "bear shall eat straw like the ox, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb; and a little child shall lead them"—the meekness of a patient love bridling all their ravening passions. It is possible that our hearts may be united to fear His name; and that one unbroken temper of whole-spirited submission may be ours.

Again, we should expect, and desire, and strive towards the correction of all that is wrong, the mending of the nets, the restoring of the havoc wrought in legitimate occupations and by any other cause. Again, we may strive with hope and confidence towards the supply of all that is lacking. "In every good"—an all-round completeness of excellence ought to be the hope, and the aim, as well as the prayer, of every Christian. Of course our various perfectings will be various. "Star differeth from star in glory," and the new man in many respects follows the lines of the old man, and temperament is permanent. But still, whilst all that is true, and while each shall ray back the Divine light and radiance at a different angle, and so with a different hue from that which his neighbour, standing beside him, may catch and reflect, on the other hand the Gospel is given to us to correct temperament, and to make the most uncongenial types of grace and excellence ours. It is meant to make it possible that men should "gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles": and to correct and fill up what is wrong and what is defective in our natural dispositions, so as that the passionate man may be made meek, and the hesitating man may be

made prompt, and the animal man may be sublimed into spirit, and all that is proper to my peculiar constitution and character may be curbed and limited, and much that is not congenial to it may be appropriated and made mine. We are all apt to grow one-sided Christians, and it is our business to try to make ours the things that are lacking in our faith, and to supplement, by the grace of God working in our hearts, the defects of our qualities and the failures of our disposition and temperament. Do not grow like a tree stuck in the middle of a wood, which has only space to put forth branches on one side, and is all lopsided and awry; but like some symmetrical growth out in the open, equal all round the strong bole, and raising in perfect completeness of harmonious beauty to the topmost twig that looks up to the sky. God means to make us "perfect in every good"; to harmonize, to correct, to restore, to perfect us, that we, having all grace, may abound in all good to His glory.

Such is His purpose. Ah, brethren! has not the recognition of that as His purpose alarmingly died out of our minds; and do we live up to the height of this prayer? I would that we should all remember more, as defining our aims, and animating our courage, and directing our hopes, that "this is the will of God, even our sanctification"; and that, when faith is dim, and effort burns low, and we are ready to put all such hopes away as a fair dream, we might be stirred to more lofty expectations, and to open our mouths wider by the thought of the "God of Peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant"; and ask ourselves what result on

us will correspond to that mighty name of the Lord.

II.—And so, secondly, note the Divine work which fulfils the prayer.

"Working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." Creation, Providence, and all God's works in the world are also through Jesus Christ. But the work which is spoken of here is yet greater and more wonderful than the general operations of the creating and preserving God, which also are produced and ministered through that eternal Word by whom the heavens were of old, and by whom the heavens are still, sustained and administered. There is, says my text, an actual Divine operation in the inmost spirit of every believing man.

I suppose that everybody must believe that, who believes in a God having any real connection with His creatures. Surely He is not so imprisoned in His own majesty, or shut out from His own creation by His own creation, as that He cannot touch the spirits which He has made. And surely we are not so walled up by our own separate individuality as that we cannot, if we will, open the door for Him to come in and dwell with us, and work on us. Surely if there be any reality in the Gospel teaching at all, there is this in it, that Christ in us, or God in Christ working in us by His Divine Spirit, is the crown of that hope and blessing of which Christ for us is the beginning and foundation.

I do not want men to think less of the Cross. God forbid! But I do feel, and feel growingly, that the Christianity of this generation has not a firm hold of this other aspect of Christ's work. Do not think less

of what He has done, but, oh! think more of what He is doing. The perspective of our Christian faith is wrong: not that we draw the Cross too large, but that we paint the Dove too small. And I would, for myself and for you, dear brethren, lay this thought upon our hearts, as a far more important one than the ordinary type of Christian thinking makes it out to be—the present dwelling of God in Christ, through the Divine Spirit, in the hearts of all who believe, and working there that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

If that be a truth, surely these things follow as our plainest Christian duty. Expect that operation. *Do* you expect it? You Christian men and women, do you believe that God will work in your hearts? Some of you do not live as if you did. Desire it. *Do* you desire it? Do you want Him to come and clear out that stable of filth that you carry about with you? Do you wish Him to come and sift and search, and bring the candle of the Lord into the dusty corners? Do you want to get rid of what is not pleasing in His sight? Would you like Him to come and search you, "to try you and see if"—ah, it is not an if!—"there be any wicked way in you, and lead you"—where, alas! our feet are often *not* found—"in the way of everlasting"? Expect it, desire it, pray for it. And, when you have got it, see that you profit by it!

God does not work by magic. The Spirit of God which cleanses men's hearts cleanses them on condition, first, of their faith; second, of their submission; and, third, of their use of His gift. If you fling yourselves into the roar of worldly life, the noise of the streets, and the whirring of the looms, and the racket of the children in the nursery, and the

buzzings of temptations round about you, and the yelpings for food of your own passions, will deafen your ears so as that you will never hear the still, small voice that speaks a present God. If God dwells in us and works in us, let us yield ourselves to the workings and open our hearts to the Guest, and say, "Into every corner, O Lord, I would that Thou wouldst go, to restore and complete."

III.—Lastly, notice the visible manifestation of this inward work.

Now the writer of our text employs the same word in the two clauses, in order to bring out the idea of a correspondence between the human and the Divine Worker. "To *work* His will, *working* in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight."

God works in order that you and I may work. Our action is to follow His. Practical obedience is the issue, and it is the test, of our having this Divine operation in our hearts. There are plenty of people who will talk largely about spiritual gifts, and almost vaunt their possession of such a Divine operation. Let us bring them and ourselves to this test: Are you doing God's will in daily life in the little things? In the monotonous grind of the dusty, level road, with never a turn in it; and the same thing to be done to-morrow that was done to-day, and so on, for indefinite weeks and months are you, with the spirit that freshens monotony, doing God's will? If so, then you may believe that God is working in you. If not, it is of no use to talk about spiritual gifts. The test of being filled with the Divine operation is that our actions shall be conformed to His will. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of

God." That is a pin prick that will empty many a swollen bladder, and bring it down to its real tenuity of substance.

Action is the end of all. We get the truth, we get our souls saved, we have all the abundance and exuberance of Divine revelation, we have the Cross of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of the Divine Spirit—miracles and marvels of all sorts have been done for the one purpose, to make us able to do what is right in God's sight, and to do it because it is His will.

This practical obedience to God's will is the perfection of human conduct. And, on the other hand, a man who does good things without reference to the highest—viz., the will of God—in the doing of them, lacks the fine gold that gilds his deed; and the violet of his virtue is scentless. A good thing may be done without reference to God—good from the point of view of morality, and the self-sacrifice and generosity that are embodied in it. But no good thing reaches its supremest goodness unless it be an act of conscious obedience to God's will.

And this doing of the will of God is perfect blessedness. All things are right for us if we submit to the will of our Father. No storms can blow us out of our course then. "Thou shalt make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee." For all creatures, being God's servants, are in covenant with him who does the will of the Lord.

And how are we to do it, brother? The world says, "Cultivate your own nature; correct your faults; strive to fill up your deficiencies." Christ says, "Cast away yourselves; and trust to Me; and I will give

you new life, and a new spirit. Cultivate that!" If we are to do God's will we must have the spirit of Him who said, "I come to do Thy will, O Lord; and Thy law is within My heart." Let us open our hearts to Him; let us seek for Him to enter in. And then, "the God of peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ."

X.

Where and with whom Faith lives.

"Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."—Heb. xii. 22, 23.

THE magnificent passage of which these words are part sums up the contrast between Judaism and Christianity which this whole Epistle has been illustrating and enforcing. The writer takes the scene on Sinai as expressive of the genius of the former Revelation, whose centre was a law which evoked the consciousness of sin, and kindled terror; and which was embodied in sensible and material symbols. Far other and better are the characteristics of the latter Revelation. That excites no dread; is given from no flashing mountain, with accompaniments of darkness and trumpet blasts and terrible words; and it brings us into contact with no mere material and therefore perishable symbols, but with realities none the less real because they are above sense, and not remote from us though they be.

For, says my text, "Ye *are* come," not "Ye *shall* come." The humblest life may be in touch with the grandest realities in the universe, and need not wait

for death to draw aside the separating curtain in order to be in the presence of God and in the heavenly Jerusalem.

How are these things brought to us? By the revelation of God in Christ. How are we brought to them? By faith in that revelation. So every believing life, howsoever encompassed by flesh and sense, can thrust, as it were, a hand through the veil, and grasp the realities beyond.

The scene described in the first words of my text may verily be the platform on which our lives are lived, howsoever in outward form they may be passed on this low earth; and the companions, which the second part of our text discloses, may verily be our companions, though we "wander lonely as a cloud," or seem to be surrounded by far less noble society. By faith we are come to the unseen realities which are come to us by the revelation of God in Christ. "Ye *are* come unto Mount Zion."

Now, looking generally at these words, they give us just two things—the scene and the companions of the Christian life. The remainder of the passage will occupy us on future occasions, but for the present I confine myself to the words which I have read. And I shall best deal with them, I think, if I simply follow that division into which they naturally fall, and ask you to note, first, where faith lives, and, second, with whom faith lives.

I.—First, then, where faith lives.

"Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." There are two points here which carry us back to the topography of the ancient sacred city. In the literal

Jerusalem, Zion was the lofty Acropolis, at once fortress and site of the king's palace, and round it clustered the dwellings of the city.

The two symbols are thus closely connected, and present substantially the same idea. And perhaps it is pressing a figure too far to find a diversity of meaning in the separate parts of this closely-connected whole. But still it seems to me that there is a substantial difference of aspect in the two clauses.

The first thought, therefore, that I would suggest to you is this, that the life of a man who has truly laid hold of Jesus Christ, and so is living by faith, is on its inward side—that is, in deepest reality—a life passed in the dwelling of the great King. All through this letter the writer is recurring to the thought of access to God, unimpeded and continual, as being the great gift which Jesus Christ has brought to us. And here he gathers it into the noblest symbol. There, lifted high above all the humbler roofs, flash the golden pinnacles of the great palace in which God Himself dwells. And we, toiling and moiling down here, surrounded by squalid circumstances, and annoyed by many cares, and limited by many narrownesses which we often find to be painful, and fighting with many sorrows, and seeming to ourselves to be, sometimes, homeless wanderers in a wilderness, may yet evermore "dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to enquire in His temple."

The privilege has for its other side a duty; the duty has for its foundation a privilege. For if it be true that the real life of every believing soul is a life that never moves from the temple-palace where God is, and that its inmost secret and the spring of its

vitality is communion with God, what shall we say of the sort of lives that most of us most often live? Is there any truth in such exalted metaphors as this in reference to us? Does it not sound far liker irony than truth to say of people whose days are so shuttlecocked about by trifling cares, and absorbed in fleeting objects, and wasted in the chase after perishable delights, that they "are come unto Mount Zion," and dwell in the presence of God? Is my "life hid with Christ in God"? There is no possibility of Death being your usher, to introduce you into the house of God not made with hands, unless Faith has introduced you into it even whilst you tarry here, and your habitual direction of heart and mind towards Him keeps you evermore at least a waiter at His threshold, if you do not pass beyond. "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

My brother, do we so knit ourselves to Him, by heartfelt acceptance of the good news of His loving proximity to us which Jesus Christ brings, as that indeed we have left earth and care and sin at the foot of the mount, with the asses and the servants, and have our faces set to the lofty sweetnesses of our "Father's house"? "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house," and no less blessed are they "in whose hearts are the ways" that lead to it.

Then let me remind you how Zion contrasts with Sinai, and thus suggests the thought that a true Christian life, based upon faith, has a communion with God which is darkened by no dread, nor disturbed by a consciousness of unforgiven sin. We have set against each other the terrors of that theophany on

Mount Sinai, attendant on or rather precedent to the giving of the law—the mountain wrapped in smoke; in the heart of the wreathing blackness the flashing fire; from out of the midst of it the long-drawn trumpet blasts, the proclamation of the coming of the King; and then the voice which, Divine as it was, froze the marrow of the hearers' bones, that they entreated that no words like these should any more fall on their trembling ears.

That is the one picture. The other shows us the mount where the King dwells, serene and peaceful the clouds far below the horizon; the flashing fire changed into lambent light; the blast of the trumpet stilled; the dread voice changed into a voice "that speaketh better things" than were heard amidst the granite cliffs of the wilderness.

And so in vivid, picturesque form the writer gathers up the one great contrast between the Revelation of which the message was law and its highest result the consciousness of sin and the shrinking that ensued, and the other of which the inmost heart is Love, and the issue the attraction of hearts by the magnetism of its grace. The old fable of a mountain of loadstone which drew ships at sea to its cliffs is true of this Mount Zion, which is exalted above the mountains that it may draw hearts tossing on the restless sea of life to the "fair havens" beneath its sheltering height. There is no dread, though there is reverence, and no fear, though there is awe, in the approach of those who come through Jesus Christ, and live beneath the smile of their reconciled God and Father. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion," the dwelling-place of the living God, from whose lips

there will steal into the ears and the hearts of those who keep near Him gracious words of consolation, so thrilling, so soothing, so enlightening, so searching, so encouraging, that they which hear them shall say "Speak yet again, that I may be blessed."

And then there is the other aspect of this scene where faith lives. "Ye are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." I need not remind you of how much we hear in this Epistle in reference to that city. It is generally set forth as being yet to come, as being the object of seeking rather than of possession. But the fact is that there are two aspects of it. In one it is future, in the other it is present. The general idea to be attached to it is simply that of the order and social state of those who love and serve God. Here, in this part of my text, we have to deal with the city rather than with its inhabitants. They follow thereafter, but, so far as we can separate between the two, we have just this idea enforced in the words that I am now commenting upon—viz., that the lowliest life, knit, as it seems to be, by so many bonds to the perishable associations and affinities of earth, yet, if it be a life of faith in Jesus Christ, has its true affinities and relationships beyond, and not here. "We have our citizenship in heaven," says the Apostle, "from whence also we look for the Saviour." And every Christian man and woman is therefore bound to two or three very plain duties.

If you are living by faith, you do not belong to this order in the midst of which you find yourself. See that you keep vivid the consciousness that you do not. Cultivate the sense of detachment from the

represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form as Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem, so the companions of that life are also represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form.

A slight alteration in the punctuation and order of the words in our text brings out, as it seems to me, the writer's idea. Suppose you put a comma after "innumerable company," and substitute for that phrase the original Greek word, so reading "and to *myriads*," and then pause there. That is the general definition, on which follows the division of the "myriads" into two parts; one of which is "the general assembly of angels," and the other is the "church of the first-born which are written in heaven." So then, of companions for us, in our lonely earthly life, there be two sorts, and as to both of them the condition of recognizing and enjoying their society is the same — viz., the exercise of faith.

Now, the word rendered "general assembly" has a grander idea in it than that. It is the technical word employed in classic Greek for the festal meetings of a nation at their great games or other solemn occasions, and always carries in it the idea of joy as well as of society. And so here the writer would have us think of one part of that great city, the heavenly Jerusalem, as, if I may so say, the dwelling-place of a loftier race of creatures whose life is immortal and pure joy; and that we, even we, have some connection with them. In an earlier part of this letter we read that they are all "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation." But here the ministration is not referred to, simply the fact of union and communion.

I am not going to enter at any length upon that subject, concerning which we know but very little. But still it seems to me that our ordinary type of Christian belief loses a great deal because it gives so little heed to the numerous teachings of the New Testament in regard to the reality of the existence of such beings, and of the tie that unites them with lowly believers here. All the servants of the King are friends of one another. And howsoever many they may be, and howsoever high above us in present stature any may tower, and howsoever impossible it be for us to see the glancing and hear the winnowing of their silver wings, as they flash upon errands of obedience to Him, and rejoice to hearken to the voice of His word, there is joy in the true belief that the else waste places of the universe are filled with those who, in their loftiness, rejoice to bend to us, saying, "I am thy fellow servant, and of them which worship God."

Brethren, we have a better face brightening the unseen than any angel face. But just because Jesus Christ fills the unseen for us, in Him we are united to all those of whom He is the Lord, and He is Lord of men as well as angels. So if the eyes of our hearts are opened, we, too, may see "the mountain full of chariots of fire and horses of fire round about" the believing soul. And we, too, may come to the joyful assembly of the angels, whose joy is all the more poignant and deep when they, the elder brethren, see the prodigals return.

But the second group of companions is probably the more important for us. "Ye are come," says the text, not only to the angelic beings that cluster round

His throne in joyful harmony, but also "to the Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." And, seeing that the names are in heaven, that means, evidently, men who themselves are here upon earth.

I have not time to dwell upon the great ideas which are here contained in the designation of the community of believing souls; I only remind you that probably the word "church" is not so much employed here in its distinct ecclesiastical sense (for there are no ecclesiastical phrases in the Epistle to the Hebrews), as with allusion to the assembly of the Israelites beneath Mount Sinai, the contrast with which colours the whole of the context. It means, therefore, in general, simply the assembly of the firstborn. Can there be more than one firstborn in a family? Yes! In this family there can, for it is a name here not pointing to a temporary order, but to dignity and prerogative. The firstborn had the right of inheritance; the firstborn was sanctified to the Lord; the firstborn, by his primogeniture, was destined in the old system to be priest and king. All Israel collectively was regarded as the firstborn of the Lord. We, if our hearts are knit to Him who is pre-eminently firstborn amongst many brethren, obtain, by virtue of our union with Him, the rights and privileges, the obligations and responsibilities, of the eldest sons of the family of God. We inherit; we ought to be sanctified. It is for us, as the "first fruits of His creatures," to bring other men to Him, that through the Church the world may reach its goal, and creation may become that which God intended it to be.

These firstborn have their names written in Heaven—inscribed on the register of the great city. And to that great community, invisible like the other realities in my text, and not conterminous with any visible society such as the existing visible Church, all those belong and come who are knit together by faith in the one Lord.

So, dear friends, it is for us to realize, in the midst, perhaps, of loneliness, the tie that knits us to every heart that finds in Jesus Christ what we do. In times when we seem to stand in a minority; in times when we are tormented by uncongenial surroundings; when we are tempted by lower society; when we are disposed to say, "I am alone, with none to lean upon," it does us good to think that, not only are there angels in heaven who may have charge concerning us but that, all over the world, there are scattered brethren whose existence is a comfort, though we never clasped their hands.

Such, then, is the scene, and such is the society, in which we may all dwell. Christian men and women, do you make conscience of realizing all this by faith, by contemplation, by direct endeavours to pierce beyond the surface and shows of things to the realities that are unseen? See to it that you avail yourself of all the power, the peace, the blessing which will be yours in the degree in which your faith makes these the home and companions of your lives.

How noble the lowest life may become, like some poor, rough sea-shell with a gnarled and dimly-coloured exterior, tossed about in the surge of a stormy sea, or anchored to a rock, but when opened all iridescent with rainbow sheen within, and bearing a

pearl of great price! So, to outward seeming, my life may be rough and solitary, and inconspicuous and sad, but, in inner reality, it may have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and have angels for its guardians, and all the firstborn for its brethren and companions.

XI.

Faith's Access to the Judge and His Attendants.

"YE are come . . . to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."—HEB. xii. 23.

THE principle of arrangement in this grand section of this letter is obscure, and I am afraid that I cannot cast much, if any, light upon it. We might, at first sight, have expected that the two clauses of our present text should have been inverted, so as to bring all the constituent parts of "the city of the living God" closely together—viz., "the angels," the members of the militant Church on earth, and those of the triumphant Church in Heaven; and also to bring together "God the Judge of all," and "Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." But the arrangement as it stands in our text, may be compared profitably with that of the preceding verses, which we were considering in the last sermon. There, as here, the allusion to the immediate presence of God passed at once into the reference to the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. And just as there Zion, the palace, was immediately connected with the city of the living God, so here the writer, harking back, as it were, to

his original starting-point, no sooner names "God the Judge" than he passes on to set before us "the spirits of just men made perfect." In the earlier clauses we have had the more general reference to the palace and the city around it. Here, if I may so say, we pass within the palace gates, and the writer tells us what we find there. This interweaving of the presence of God with that of the creatures that live in His love witnesses to the great truth that our God dwells in no isolated supremacy, but in the midst of a blessed society; and that the solitary souls that find their way into His presence have a welcome, not only from Him, but from all their brethren of His great family.

So the arrangement may not be so inexplicable, as, at first sight, it strikes us as being, if it suggests to us the close and indissoluble connection between God Himself and all those who, in every place, whether the place above or the place beneath, call upon the name of Him who is both their God and ours. In dealing with these words, I have simply to consider these two ideas thus set before us.

I.—Faith plants us at the very bar of God.

"Ye are come to God the Judge of all." Now, it is to be observed that, more accurately, the words might be rendered, "Ye are come to the God of all as Judge"; for the point which the writer wishes to bring out is not so much the general idea of the Divine presence, as that presence considered under a specific aspect, and referring to one mode of His action—viz., the judicial. It is further to be noticed that the judgment which is here spoken about is not, as the very language, "Ye *are* come to the Judge," implies, future, but present. The Old Testament, with

continual reference to which this letter is saturated, has a great deal more to say about the present continuous judgment which God works all through the ages than about the final future judgment. And, in accordance, not only with the language of our text, which makes *coming* a present thing, but, in accordance also with the whole tone of the Old Testament, we should recognize here, not so much a reference to the final tribunal before which all mankind must stand (at which the Judge is characteristically represented in the New Testament as being, not God the Father, but Jesus Christ), as to the continual judgment, both in the sense of decision as to character and infliction of consequences, which is being exercised *now* by the God of all.

So, then, the first thought that I would suggest from this idea is, Here is a truth which it is the office of faith to realize continually in our daily lives. Your loving access to God, Christian men and women, has brought you right under the eye of the Judge, and, though there be no terror in our approach to that tribunal, there ought to be a wholesome awe as the permanent attitude of our spirits, the awe which is the very opposite of the cowering dread which hath torment. He would be a bold criminal who would commit crimes in the very judgment hall and before the face of his judge. And that must be a very defective Christian faith which, like the so-called faith of many amongst us, goes through life and sins in entire oblivion of the fact that it stands in the very presence of the Judge of all the earth. Oh, if we could rend the veil as death will rend it, and see the things which are, as faith will help us to see them

—for it *thins*, if it does not tear, the envious curtain between—would it be possible that we should live the low, mean, selfish, earthly, sinful lives, devoured by anxieties, defaced by stains, depressed by trivial sorrows, which, alas! so many of us do live? "Ye are come . . . unto God the Judge of all." "If ye call Him Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Then, again, notice that this judgment of God is one which a Christian man should joyfully accept. "The Lord will judge His people," says one of the psalms. "You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities" says one of the prophets. Such sayings represent this present judgment as inevitable, just because of the close connection into which true faith brings a man with his Father in Heaven. Inevitable, and likewise most blessed and desirable, for in the thought are included all the methods by which, in providence, and by ministration of His truth and of His Spirit, God reveals to us our hidden meannesses; and delivers us sometimes, even by the consequences which accrue from them, from the burden and power of our sin.

So, then, the office of faith in regard of this continuous judgment which God is exercising upon us because He loves us is, first of all, to open our hearts to it by confession, by frank communion, by referring all our actions to Him to court that investigation. That judgment is no mere knowledge by cold Omniscience, such as a heathen conception of the Divine eye might make it to be; but just as a careful

gardener will go over his rose-trees, and the more carefully the more precious they are in his sight, to pick from each nestling-place at the junction of the leaves the tiny insects that are sucking out their sap, and destroying them, so God will search our hearts in order to pluck from these the crawling evils which, microscopic and tiny as they may be, will yet, in their multitude innumerable, be destructive of our spirits' lives.

It is a *gospel* when we say, "The Lord will judge His people." Therefore in many a psalm we have the writers spreading themselves out before God, and beseeching Him to come and search them, and try them, and sift them through His sieve, and know them altogether, in the sure confidence that wheresoever He beholds an evil He will be ready to cure it, and that whosoever spreadeth out His sin before God will be lightened of the burden of his sin.

This merciful judgment, which is, in fact, all directed to the perfecting and sanctifying of its subjects, reaches its end in the measure in which we register its decisions in our consciences. God writes His mind about us on them, and when they speak they are only speaking an echo of the sentence that has been pronounced from that loftier tribunal. Therefore, whosoever professeth himself to be a Christian and does anything, be it great or small, which his conscience rebukes when done, and prohibited before it was done, that man is despising the judgment of God, and bringing down upon himself the condemnation which follows despised judgment. "If we should judge ourselves we should not be judged." Reverence your consciences: they are the

echo of the Judge's voice; peruse their records: they are the register of the Judge's sentence; and whensoever that inward voice speaks, bow before it and say, "Lord! Thy servant heareth."

And then, further, remember that this judgment is one that demands our thankful acceptance of the discipline which it puts in force. If we knew ourselves we should bless God for our sorrows. These are His special means of drawing His children away from their evil. "When we are chastened, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." Oh! there would be less impatience, less blank amazement when suffering comes to us, less vain and impotent regrets for vanished blessings, if we saw in all the dealings of our Father's hands the results of His judgment, and believed that it is better for us to be separated, though it be with violence and much bleeding of torn-away hearts, from our idols than that our idolatry should destroy us and mar them. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." This judgment is not only the merciful separation of us from our sins, but it is also a judgment on our behalf.

The office of the early Jewish judges was not only the judicial one which we mean by the word, but was much wider, and some trace of that idea runs through almost all the Old Testament references to the Divine judgment. It comes to mean, not merely a decision adverse or favourable, as the case may be, as to the moral character of its subjects, but it also substantially means pleading their cause, defending their right, intervening for them. And so in many a psalm you will find such petitions as this, "Judge me, O

Lord; for I am poor and needy. Plead my cause against them which rise up against me." And the same conception of the Judge's office appears in one of our Lord's parables, familiar to us all, in which we are told that "the Lord will judge His own elect, though He bear long with them."

Thus, another of the blessed thoughts that come out of this conception of our approach to "the Judge of all" is that we may confidently commit our cause to Him, and leave our vindication in His hands. So abstinent from self-assertion, from self-vindication, from vengeance or recompense, patience, courage, consolation, strength, all these virtues will be ours if we understand to whom we come by our faith, and can behold, on the throne of the universe, One who will plead our cause, and undertake for us whensoever we are burdened or oppressed.

II.—Secondly, Faith carries us while living to the society of the living dead.

"The Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect." Immediately on the thought of God rising in the writer's mind, there rises also the blessed thought of the blessed company in the centre of whom He lives and reigns. We can say little about that subject, and perhaps the less we say the more we shall understand, and the more deeply we shall feel. We get glimpses but no clear vision, as when a flock of birds turn in their rapid flight, and for a moment the sun glances on their white wings; and then, with another turn, they drift away, spots of blackness in the blue. So we see but for a moment as the light falls, and then lose the momentary glory, but we may at least reverently note the exalted words here.

"The spirits of . . . . men made perfect." That is to say, they dwell freed from the incubus and limitations, and absolved from the activities, of a bodily organization. We cannot understand such a condition. To us it may seem to mean passivity or almost unconsciousness, but we know, as another New Testament writer has told us, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and that in some deep, and to us undiscoverable, fashion, that which the corporeal frame does for men here, immersed in the material world, there the encircling Christ in whom they rest does for them. We know little more, but we have a glimpse of a land of deep peace in which repose is not passivity nor unconsciousness, any more than service is weariness. And there we have to leave it, knowing only this, that it is possible for a man to exist and to be, in a relative sense, perfected without a body.

Then, further, these spirits are "perfect."

The writer has said, at the close of the preceding chapter, that the ancient saints "without us should not be made perfect." And here he employs the same word with distinct reference, as I suppose, to his previous declaration. From which I infer that that old thought is true, that Jesus Christ shot some rays of His victorious and all-reconciling power from His Cross into the regions of darkness, and brought thence those who were waiting for His coming through many a long age. A great painter has left on the walls of a little cell in his Florentine convent a picture of the victorious Christ, white-robed and banner-bearing, breaking down the iron gates that shut in the dark rocky cave; and flocking to Him, with outstretched

hands of eager welcome, the whole long series from the first man downwards, hastening to rejoice in His light, and to participate in His redemption.

So the ancient Church was "perfected" in Christ; but the words refer, not only to those Old Testament patriarchs and saints, but to all who, up to the time of the writer's composition of his letter, had "slept in Jesus." They have reached their goal in Him. The end for which they were created has been attained. They are in the summer of their powers, and full-grown adults, whilst we here, the maturest and the wisest, the strongest and the holiest, are but as babes in Christ.

But yet that "perfecting" does not exclude progress, continuous through all the ages; and especially it does not exclude one great step in advance which, as Scripture teaches us, will be taken when the resurrection of the body is granted. Corporeity is the perfecting of humanity. Body, soul, and spirit, these make the full-summed man in all his powers. And so the souls beneath the altar, clothed in white, and lapt in felicity, do yet wait for the adoption, even the redemption of the body.

Mark, further, that these spirits perfected would not have been perfected there unless they had been made just here. That is the first step, without which nothing in death has any tendency to ennoble or exalt men. If we are ever to come to the perfecting of the heavens, we must begin with the justifying that takes place on earth.

Let me point you to one other consideration, bearing not so much on the condition as on the place of these perfected spirits. It is very significant, as I tried to

point out, that they should be closely associated in our text with "God the Judge of all." Is there any hint there that men who have been redeemed, who, being unjust, have been made just, and have had experience of restoration and of the misery of departure, shall, in the ultimate order of things, stand nearer the Throne than unfallen spirits, and teach angels? It is the "just men made perfect," and not the festal assembly of the angels, that are brought into connection here with "the Judge of all." Is there any hint that in some sense these perfected spirits are assessors of God in His great judgment? "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," seems to point in that direction. But the ground is precarious, and I only point to the words in passing as possibly affording a foothold for a "perhaps."

But the more important consideration is the real unity between poor souls here who are knit to Jesus Christ, and the spirits of the just made perfect who stand so close to the judgment seat.

Ah! brethren, we have to alter the meaning of the words "present" and "absent" when we come to speak of spiritual realities. The gross localized conceptions that are appropriate to material space, and to transitory time, have nothing to do with that higher region. It is no mere piece of rhetoric or sentiment to say that where our treasure is, there are our hearts, and where our hearts are there are we.

Love has no localities. It knits together two between whom oceans wide roll; it knits together saints on earth and saints in heaven. To talk of place is irrelevant in reference to such a union; for if our love, our aims, our hopes be the same, we are

together. And if they on the upper side, and we on the lower, grasp each the outstretched hand of the same God, then we are one in Him, and the same life will tingle through our earthly frames, and through their perfected spirits. He is the centre of the great wheel whose spokes are light and blessedness; and all that stand around Him are brought into unity by common relation to the centre.

Our sorrows would be less sorrowful, our loss less utter, if we truly believed that while apart we are still together. Our courage and our hope would rise if we came closer in loving contemplation and believing thought to the present blessedness of those once our fellow-travellers, who, weak as we, have entered into rest. Heaven itself would gain some touch of true attractiveness if we more clearly saw, and more thankfully felt, that there is "the Judge of all," and there also "the spirits of just men made perfect."

But howsoever great may be the encouragement, the consolation, the quieting that come from them, let us turn away our eyes from the surrounding and lower seats to fix them on the central throne. Let us ever realise that we are ever in our great Judge's eye. Let us spread out our hearts for His scrutiny and decision, for His discipline if need be. Let us commit to Him our cause, and, in the peace that comes therefrom, we may understand why it was that psalmists of old called upon earth to rejoice and the hills to be glad because He "cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth."

XII.

The Messenger of the Covenant and its Seal.

"YE are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."—HEB. xii. 24.

IN previous sermons on the preceding context we have had frequent occasion to remark on the parallel and contrast between Sinai and Zion, as expressive of the difference between the genius of Judaism and Christianity, which shapes the whole of this section. That contrast and parallel are most obvious at its beginning and here at its close.

In the beginning we had the mountain of the Law, swathed in darkness, lit by flashing flame, contrasted with the sunny slopes of Zion, palace-crowned, and the wild desert set in opposition to the city of peace that clustered round the foot of Zion's Mount. Here at the close we have the key-words of the old Revelation laid hold of and applied to the new. Judaism was a covenant in the form of a law, of which the terms were these: "Do, and thou shalt live!" The Gospel is a covenant in the form of a promise, of which the tenour is "Believe and live; live and do!" The ancient

law. But their message is to you and me quite as much; and I desire now simply to bring out the large and permanent meanings which lie beneath them.

I.—First, then, note that God's revelation to us is in the form of a covenant.

Now, of course, when we talk about a covenant or compact between two men, we mean a matter of bargaining on the terms of which both have been consulted, and which has assumed its final form after negotiations and perhaps compromise. But there are necessarily limitations to the transference of all human ideas to Divine relations. One such limitation is expressed in the very language of the original. The word rendered "covenant" suppresses the idea of conjunction, and emphasises that of appointment. By which we are to learn that the covenant which God makes with man is of His own settling and is not the result of mutual giving and taking; that men have nothing to do with the determining of these conditions; that He Himself has made them, and that He is bound by them, not because we have arranged them with Him, but because He has announced them to us. With that limitation we can take the idea and apply it to the relation between God and us, established in the great message of the Gospel.

For what is the notion that underlies the old-fashioned, and to some of you obsolete and unwelcome word? Why! simply this, it is a definite disclosure of God's purpose as affecting you and me, by which disclosure He is prepared to stand and to be bound. It is a revelation, but a revelation that obliges the Revealer to a certain course of conduct; or, if you

would rather have a less theological word, it is a system of promise under which God mercifully has willed that we should live. And just as when a king gives forth a proclamation, he is bound by the fact that he gave it forth, so God, out of all the infinite possibilities of His action, condescends to tell us what His line is to be, and He will adhere to it. He lets us see the works of the clock, if I may so say, not wholly, but in so far as we are affected by His action.

What, then, are the terms of this covenant? We have them drawn out, first, in the words of Jeremiah, who apprehended, when he was dwelling in the midst of that eternal system, that it could not be a final system; and next, by the writer of this letter quoting the prophet, who, in the midst of the vanishing of that which could be shaken, saw emerging, like the fairy form of the fabled goddess out of the sea-foam, the vast and permanent outlines of a nobler system. The promises of the Covenant are, then, full forgiveness as the foundation of all, and built upon that, knowledge of God inwardly illuminating and making a man independent of external helps, though he may sometimes be grateful for them; then a mutual possession which is based upon these, whereby I, even I, can venture to say, God is mine, and, more wonderful still, I, even I, can venture to believe that He bends down from heaven and says: "And thou, thou art Mine!" and then, as the result of all—named first, but coming last in the order of nature—the law of His commandment will be so written upon the heart that delight and duty are spelt with the same letters, and His will is our will. These are the elements, or you can gather them all up into one,

namely, the promise of eternal *life*—based upon forgiveness, operating through the knowledge of God, and issuing in perfect conformity to His blessed will.

If these, then, be the articles of the paction, think for a moment of the blessedness that lies hived in this ancient, and to some of us musty, thought of a covenant of God's. It gives a basis for knowledge. Unless He audibly and articulately and verifiably utters His mind and will, I know not where men are to go to get it. Without an actual revelation from heaven, of other nature, of clearer contents, of more solid certitude than the revelations that may have been written upon the tablets of our hearts, over which we have too often scrawled the devil's message, and over and above the ambiguous articles that may be picked out and pieced together, from reflection upon providence and nature, we need something better and firmer, more comprehensively and more manifestly authoritative, before we are entitled to say, "Behold! I *know* that God loves me, and that I may put my trust in Him." Brethren! I for my part believe that between agnosticism on that side, and the full evangelical faith of the New Testament in a supernatural revelation on this side, all forms of so-called Christianity which shy at the idea of a supernatural revelation are destined to have the life squeezed out of them, and that what will be left will be the two logical positions; first, God, if there be a God, never spoke, and we do not know anything about Him; and, second, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." If there be a God at

all, and if there be in Him any love and any righteousness, it is infinitely more reasonable to suppose that He should have spoken His mind and heart to men, and given them a covenant on which they can reckon, than that He has been from the beginning a dumb God, that never opened His mouth with a word of guidance or of sympathy for the sons of men. Believe that who may; I cannot believe in a pure theism, which has no place for a supernatural revelation.

And then, again, let me remind you how here is the one foothold, if I may so say, for confidence. If God hath not spoken there is nothing to reckon upon. There are perhapses, probabilities if you like, possibilities, but nothing beyond. And no man can build a faith on a peradventure. There must be solid ground on which to rest; and here is solid ground: "I make a covenant with you." "God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent." And armed with that great thought that He has verily rent the darkness and spoken words which commit *Him* and assure *us*, we, even the weakest of us, may venture to go to Him, and plead with Him that He cannot and dare not alter the thing that has gone forth out of His mouth; and so, in deepest reverence, can approach Him and plead the necessity of a great *Must* under which He has placed Himself by His own word. God is faithful, the covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God.

II.—Secondly, mark that Jesus Christ is the Executor of this covenant.

Moses, of course, was a go-between, in a mere external sense—from the mountain to the plain and

from the plain to the mountain, he passed, and in either case simply carried a message bearing God's will to man or man's submission to God. But we have to dig far deeper into the idea than that of a mere outward messenger who carries what is entrusted to him, as an errand boy might, if we are to get the notion of Christ's relation with these great promises, which, massed together, are God's covenant with us. Observe that the emphasis is here laid on the manhood of the Lord. It is *Jesus* who is the "Mediator of the covenant"; and observe, too, that that idea passes into the wider notion of His place as the link uniting God and man. The depth of the thought is only reached when we recognize His divinity and His humanity. He is the ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven.

Because God dwells in Him, and the Word became flesh, He is able to lay His hand upon both, and to bring God to man and man to God.

He brings God to man. If what I have been saying is at all true, that for all solid faith we must have an articulate declaration of the Divine mind and heart, it seems to me to be equally irrefragable that for any such declaration of the Divine heart and mind we must have a human vehicle. God speaks through men. It is His highest way of making Himself known to men. And Jesus Christ in His Manhood declares God to us. Not by the mere words which He speaks, as a Teacher and a wise Man, a religious genius and a saint, a philosopher and a poet, a moralist and a judge; but by these, and also by His life, by His emotions of pity and gentleness and patience, and by everything that He does

Manhood has done has made it possible that such promises should be given to us. And, still further, He is the Mediator of the Covenant, in so far as He Himself possesses in His humanity all the blessings which Manhood is capable of deriving from the Father, and He has them all in order that He may give them all. There is the great Reservoir from which all men may fill their tiny cups.

Men tell us that they want no Mediator between them and God. Ah! my brother, go down into your own hearts; try to understand what sin is; and then go up as near as you can to the dazzling white light, and try partially to conceive of what God's holiness is, and tell us, Do you think you, as you are, could walk in that light and not be consumed? It seems to me that no man who has any deep knowledge of his own heart, and any, though it be inadequate, yet true, conception of the Divine nature, dare take upon his lips that boast that we often hear, "We need none to come between us and God."

For me, I thankfully hear Him say, "No man cometh to the Father but by Me"; and pray for grace to tread in that only way that leadeth unto God.

III.—Note the sprinkling of the blood which seals the Covenant.

There is an allusion there, as I have already suggested, to the ceremonial at Sinai, when, in token of their entrance into the Covenant, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the crowd; and also an allusion to the voice of the blood of the innocent Abel, which "cried to God from the ground." The writer has already referred to that in the earlier part of the letter; and here he weaves the two together

because, with whatever differences of representation, the substantial meaning of both images is the same. The blood shed establishes the covenant; and the blood sprinkled brings us into it.

If Jesus had not died, there would have been no promises for us, beginning in forgiveness and ending in wills delighting in God's law. It is "the new covenant in His blood." The death of Christ is ever present to the Divine mind and determines the Divine action.

Hence the allusion to the voice, in contrast both to the dread voice that echoed among the grim peaks of Sinai, and to that which, as if each drop had a tongue, called from Abel's innocent blood for retribution. Christ's, too, has a voice, and that an all-powerful one. It cries for pardon with the same authority of intercession as we hear in His wondrous high-priestly prayer: "Father, I will."

Further, that sprinkling, which introduced technically and formally these people into that covenant, represents for us the personal application to ourselves of the power of His death and of His life, by which we may make all God's promises our own, and be cleansed from all sin. It is "sprinkled." Then it is capable of division into indefinitely small portions, and of the closest contact with individuals. That is but a highly metaphorical way of saying that Jesus Christ has died for each of us, that each of us may find acceptance and cleansing, and the inheritance of all the promises, if we put our trust in Him.

For remember, these words of my text are the end of a great sentence, which begins, "Ye are come."

Faith is coming. What did Christ say? "He that

cometh unto Me shall hever hunger. He that believeth on Me shall never thirst." There is His own intrepretation of the metaphor. Whosoever trusts Him, comes to Him. If I put my tremulous faith on that dear Lord, though He be on the throne of the universe, and I down here, in this far-away dim corner of His creation, I am with Him where He is, and no film of distance need separate us. If we trust Him we come to Him. If we rest upon Him as our advocate and hope, then the loud voice of our sins will not be heard, accusing-tongued though they be, above the voice of His pleading blood.

And they who come to Christ, therein and thereby, come to all other glorious and precious persons and things in the universe. For, as I have already said, my text is the end of a long sentence, and is last named as being the foundation of all that precedes, and the condition of our finding ourselves in touch with all the other glories of which the writer has been speaking. He that comes to Christ is in the city. He that comes to Christ *is*—not *will be* in the palace. He that comes to Christ is in the presence of the Judge. He that comes to Christ touches angels and perfected spirits, and is knit to all that are knit to the same Lord. He that comes to Christ comes to cleansing, and enters into the fulness of the promise, and lives in the presence and companionship of his present-absent Lord. If we come to Jesus by faith, Jesus will come at last to us, to receive us to Himself; and join us to the choirs of the perfected spirits who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

XIII.

Refusing God's Voice.

"SEE that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven."—HEB. xii. 25.

THE writer has finished his great contrast of Judaism and Christianity as typified by the mounts Sinai and Zion. But the scene at the former still haunts his imagination and shapes this solemn warning. The multitude gathered there had shrunk from the Divine voice, and "entreated that it might not be spoken to them any more." So may we do, standing before the better mount of a better Revelation. The parallel between the two congregations at the two mountains is still more obvious if we remark that the word translated in my text "refuse" is the same as has just been employed in a previous verse, describing the conduct of the Israelites, where it is rendered "entreated." It may seem strange that after so joyous and triumphant an enumeration of the glorious persons and things with whom we are brought into contact by faith, there should come the jarring note of solemn warning which seems to bring back

the terrors of the ancient Law. But, alas! the glories and blessedness into which faith introduces us are no guarantees against its decay; and they who are "come unto Mount Zion and the city of the living God," may turn their backs upon all the splendour, and wander away into the gaunt desert.

I.—So we have here, first of all, the solemn possibility of refusal.

Now, to gain the whole force and solemnity of this exhortation, it is very needful to remember that it is addressed to professing Christians, who have in so far exercised real faith, as that, by it they *are* come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God." We are to keep that clear, or we lose the whole force and meaning of this exhortation before us, which is addressed distinctly, emphatically, and in its true application exclusively to Christian men—"See that *ye* refuse not Him that speaketh."

Then, again, it is to be noted that the refusal here spoken about, and against which we professing Christians are thus solemnly warned, is not necessarily entire intellectual rejection of the Gospel and its message. For the Israelites, who made the original "refusal," to which that which we are warned against is paralleled, recognised the voice that they would not listen to as being God's voice; and just because it was His voice wanted to hear no more of it. And so, although we may permissibly extend the words before us to include more than is thereby originally meant, yet we must remember that the true and proper application of them is to the conduct of men who, recognising that God is speaking to them, do not want to hear anything more from Him. That is to say,

this warning brings to us Christians the reminder that it is possible for us so to tamper with what we know to be the uttered will and expressed commandment of God as that our conduct is tantamount to saying, "Be silent, O Lord! and let me not hear Thee speak any more to me." The reason for that refusal, which thus, in its deepest criminality and darkest sin, can only be made by men that recognise the voice to be God's, lies just here, "they could not endure that which was commanded." So, then, the sum of the whole thing is this, that it is possible for Christian people so to cherish wills and purposes which they know to be in diametrical and flagrant contradiction to the will and purpose of God, that obstinately they prefer to stick by their own desires, and, if it may be, to stifle the voice of God.

Then, remember, too, that this refusal, which in reality is the rising up of the creature's will, tastes, inclinations, desires against the manifest and recognized will of God may, and as a matter of fact often does, go along with a great deal of lip reverence and unconsciously hypocritical worship. These men from whom the writer is drawing his warning in the wilderness there, said, "Don't let *Him* speak! We are willing to obey all that He has to command; only let it come to us through human lips, and not in these tremendous syllables that awe our spirits." They thought themselves to be perfectly willing to keep the commandments when they were given, and all that they wanted was some little accommodation to human weakness in the selection of the medium by which the word was brought. So we may be wrenching ourselves away from the voice of God,

because we uncomfortably feel that it is against our resolves, and all the while may never know that we are unwilling to obey His commandments. The unconscious refusal is the formidable and the fatal one.

It comes by reason, as I have said, fundamentally from the rising up of our own determinations and wishes against His commandments; but it is also due to other causes operating along with this. How can you hear God's voice if you are letting your own yelping dog-kennel of passions speak so loudly as they do? Will God's voice be heard in a heart that is all echoing with earthly wishes, loudly clamant for their gratification, or with sensual desires passionately demanding their food to be flung to them? Will God's voice be heard in a heart where the janglings of contending wishes and earthly inclinations are perpetually loud in their brawling? Will it be heard in a heart which has turned itself into a sounding board for all the noises of the world and the voices of men? The voice of God is heard in silence, and not amidst the Babel of our own hearts. And they who, unconsciously perhaps of what they are doing, open their ears wide to hear what they themselves in the lower parts of their souls prescribe, or bow themselves in obedience to the precepts and maxims of men round them, are really refusing to hear the voice of God.

It is not to be forgotten, howsoever, that whilst thus the true and proper application of these words is to Christian men, and the way by which we refuse to listen to that awful utterance is by withdrawing our lives from the control of His will, and dragging away our contemplations from meditation upon His word,

yet there is a further form in which men may refuse that voice, which eminently threatened the persons to whom this warning was first directed. All through this letter we see that the writer is in fear that his correspondents should fall away into intellectual and complete rejection of Christianity. And the reason was mainly this, that the fall of the ancient and sacred system of the old covenant might lead them to distrust all revelation from God, and to cast aside the Gospel message. So the exhortation of my text assumes a special closeness of application to us whose lot has been cast in revolutionary times as was theirs, and who have, in our measure, something of that same experience to go through, which made the sharp trial of these Hebrew Christians. To them, solid and permanent as they had fancied them, ancient and God-appointed realities and ordinances were melting away; and it was natural that they should ask themselves, "Is there anything that will not melt, on which we can rest?" And to us in this day much of the same sort of discipline is appointed; and we, too, have to see, both in the religious and in the social world, much evidently waxing old and ready to vanish away which our fathers thought to be permanent. And the question for us is, Is there anything that we can cling to? Yes! to the "voice that speaks from heaven" in Jesus Christ. As long as that is sounding in our ears we may calmly look out on the evanescence of the evanescent, and confidently rely on the permanence of the permanent. And so, brother, though this, that, and the other of the externals of Christianity, in polity, in form, in mode, may be passing away, be sure of this, the solid core

abides; and that core lies in the first word of this letter. "God . . . hath spoken unto us in His Son." See that no experience of mutation leads you to falter in your confidence in that voice, and "see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh."

II.—Again, note the sleepless vigilance necessary to counteract the tendency to refusal.

"See that ye refuse not." A warning finger is, as it were, lifted. Take heed against the tendencies that lie in yourself and the temptations around you. The consciousness of the possibility of the danger is half the battle. "Blessed is the man that feareth always," says the psalm. "The confident"—by which is meant the presumptuous, and not the trustful—"goeth on and is punished." The timid—by which I mean the self-distrustful—clings to God, because he knows his danger, and is safe. If we think that we are on the verge of falling, we are nearer standing than we ever are besides. To lay to heart the reality, and the imminence, and the gravity of the possibility that is disclosed here is an essential part of the means for preventing its becoming a reality. They who would say "I cannot turn away because I have come," have yet to learn the weakness of their own hearts and the strength of the world that draws them away. There is no security for us except in the continual temper of rooted self-distrust, for there is no motive that will drive us to the continual confidence in which alone is security but the persistent pressure of that sense that in ourselves we are nothing, and cannot but fall. I want no man to live in that selfish and anxious dread "which hath torment," but I am sure that the shortest road to the brave security

which is certain of never being defeated is the clear and continual consciousness that

> **In ourselves we nothing can,**
> **Full soon were we down-ridden ;**
> **But for us fights the proper Man,**
> **Whom God Himself hath bidden.**

The dark underside of the triumphant confidence, which on its sunny side looks up to heaven and receives its light, is that self-distrust which says always to ourselves, "We have to take heed lest we refuse Him that speaketh."

If there is any need to dwell upon specific methods by which this vigilance and continuous self-distrust may work out for us our security, one would say—by careful trying to reverse all these conditions which, as we have seen, lead us surely to the refusal. Silence the passions, the wishes, the voices of your own wills and tastes and inclinations and purposes. Bring them all into close touch with Him. Let there be no voice in your hearts till you know God's will; and then with a leap let your hearts be eager to do it. Keep yourselves out of the babble of the world's voices ; and be accustomed to go by yourselves and let God speak. Nature seems to be silent to the busy traveller who never gets away from the thumping of the piston of the engine, and the rattle of the wheels of the train. Let him go and sit down by himself on the mountain top, and the silence becomes all vocal and full of noises. Go into the lone place of silent contemplation, and so get near God, and you will hear His voice. But you will not hear it unless you still the beating of your own heart. Even in such busy lives as most

of us have to live it is possible to secure some space for such solitary communion and meditation if we seriously feel that we must, and are ready to cut off needless distractions. He who thus has the habit of going alone with God will be able to hear his voice piercing through the importunate noises of earth, which drown it for others. Do promptly, precisely, perfectly, all that you know He *has* said. That is the way to sharpen your ears for the more delicate intonations of His voice, and the closer manifestions of His will. If you do not, the voice will hush itself into silence. Thus bringing your lives habitually into contact with God's word, and testing them all by it, you will not be in danger of "refusing Him that speaketh."

III.—Lastly, note the solemn motives by which this sleepless vigilance is enforced.

"If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth"—or, perhaps, "who on earth refused Him that spake"—"much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven." The clearness of the voice is the measure of the penalty of non-attention to it. The voice that spoke on earth had earthly penalties as the consequence of disobedience. The voice that speaks from heaven, by reason of its loftier majesty, and of the clearer utterances which are granted to us thereby, necessarily involves more severe and fatal issues from negligence to it.

Mark how the words of my text deepen and darken in their significance in the latter portion. In the first we had simply "refusal," or the desire not to hear the voice, and in the latter portion that has solidified and

deepened itself into "turning away from Him." That is to say, when we once begin, as many professing Christians have begun, to be intolerant of God's voice meddling with their lives, we are upon an inclined plane, which, with a sharp pitch and a very short descent, carries us down to the darker condition of "turning away from Him." The man that stops his ears will very soon turn his back and be in flight, so far as he can, from the voice. Do not tamper with God's utterances. If you do, you have begun a course that ends in alienation from Him.

Then mark, again, the evils which fell upon these people who turned away from Him that speaketh on earth were their long wanderings in the wilderness, and their exclusion from the Land of Promise, and final deaths in the desert, where their bleaching bones lay white in the sunshine. And if you and I, dear friends, by continuous and increasing deafness to our Father's voice, have turned away from Him, then all that assemblage of flashing glories and majestic persons, and of reconciling blood to which we come by faith, will melt away, "and leave not a wrack behind." We shall be like men who, in a dream, have thought themselves in a king's palace, surrounded by beauty and treasures, and have awakened with a start and a shiver to find themselves alone in the desert. It will be loss enough if the fair city which hath foundations, and the palace-home of the king on the mountain, and the joyful assemblage of the angels, and the Church of the firstborn, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and the blood of sprinkling, all pass away from our vision, and instead of them there is nothing left but this mean, vulgar, fleeting world.

They *will* pass if you do not listen to God, and *that* is why so many of you have so little conscious contact with the unseen and glorious realities to which faith gives access.

But then there are dark and real penalties to come in another life which the writer dimly shows to us. It is no part of my business to enlarge upon these solemn warnings. An inspired man may do it. I do not think that it is reverent for me to do it much. But at the same time let me remind you that terror is a legitimate weapon to which to appeal, and unwelcome and unfashionable as its use is nowadays, it is one of the weapons in the armoury of the true preacher of God's Word. I believe we Christian ministers would do more if we were less chary of speaking out "the terror of the Lord." And though I shrink from anything like vulgar and rhetorical and sensational appeals to that side of divine revelation, and to what answers to it in us, I consider that I should be a traitor to the truth if I did not declare the fact that such appeals are legitimate, and that such terror is a part of the Divine Revelation.

So, dear friends, though I dare not dwell upon these, I dare not burke them. I remind you—and I do no more—of the tone that runs through all this letter, of which you have such instances as these, "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" and "Of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall they be thought worthy who have counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified a common thing?"

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh," for the clearer, the tenderer, the more stringent the beseechings of the love and the warnings of Christ's voice, the more solemn the consequences if we stop our ears to it. Better to hear it now, when it warns, and pleads, and beseeches, and comforts, and hallows, and quickens, than to hear it first when it rends the tombs and shakes the earth, and summons all to judgment, and condemns some to the outer darkness to which they had first condemned themselves.

XIV.

How Jesus Deepened a Shallow Confession.

"THE same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."—JOHN iii. 2.

THE singular designation of Nicodemus in roundabout fashion as "a man of the Pharisees" connects this narrative with the preceding verses, in which we hear of many who believed in Christ, but to whom our Lord did not commit Himself, because "He knew all men," and also "knew what was in man." One such man was Nicodemus, to whom, however, exceptionally our Lord did commit Himself, though his faith, too, was but based upon miracle, because He saw that there was in him the capacity for nobler and fuller faith. Reticence and frankness were equally the results of His insight, and each appropriate in its place.

The confession of Nicodemus is incomplete and faulty in more than one respect, but still our Lord must have discerned in him the desire for fuller light, and so, as always, He gratifies it. Nicodemus only

recognizes Jesus Christ as a Teacher; and the whole context is profoundly instructive as showing us how our Lord desired to substitute for that inadequate conception of Himself a truer one; and also as instructing us in the path by which a man may pass from the shallower to the deeper; and, beginning with the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as a Teacher, may be led to see in Him the Son of Man who came down from heaven to give life unto the world. It is this process to which I desire especially to turn attention in this sermon. It has for its two termini Nicodemus' confession, "We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God," and Christ's declaration, "The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

I.—So, then, first, look at the inadequate and faulty starting-point.

Nicodemus' confession, howsoever to the all-seeing eye of Christ it may have yielded the promise of something better in the future, was manifestly inadequate in more than one particular. It was imperfect in its conception of Him. He acknowledges that Jesus Christ is a "rabbi," and that was a great deal from a rabbi regularly trained, who had graduated in the schools, and had his degree of Master in the legitimate, educational fashion. And now he sees that in this Galilean peasant, a stranger to all the assemblages of Jewish learning, there did dwell the power of a teacher. He emphasizes the irregularity of His promotion to the office because, in the original, "from God" occupies an unusual and emphatic position in the sentence, as if it explained how the

doctor of the schools condescended to recognize the doctor that had never been in any of them. He sees in Him a Teacher; and that is all. He was only one of a long series, from Moses downwards, whose words during all the ages had been as empty wind whistling through an archway, powerless to arrest evil, and impotent to bring the golden age. Here is another of the long, dreary succession, with no more weapons than His predecessors, and no more prospect of doing much with the weapons that He had. "Thou art a Teacher, come from God"; and there an end.

His confession is imperfect in its alleged basis. What did Nicodemus mean by demonstrating—surely most superfluously and inappropriately—to Jesus Christ that He was a Teacher because He could work miracles? It looks as if he were not quite sure of his own ground, and was quite as much strengthening his own somewhat tremulous convictions by this most *mal à propos* introduction of the reasons which had led him to his faith, such as it was. It was built entirely upon the fact of miracle. Now, all through this Gospel eminently, and, though less manifestly, in other parts of Scripture, a faith which has no account to give of itself beyond this, that it is produced by miracles, is treated as the lowest possible form of faith; and as scarcely deserving to be called so at all. It is not enough that a man should recognize the commission of the Messenger because He does wonderful works. What is wanted is that his heart should leap up in response to the message, and that it, and not the authority of the speaker, should be the thing that commends both speaker and message to him. A man who only says, "Thou hast done

things which I could not do, therefore perforce I must take Thee to be a Messenger of God"; and does not say, "Thy words search my heart and fill my spirit, and find an answer to my inmost being, by their sweetness and their power, which leaves me no alternative but to accept their truth"—such a man is only in the swaddling-bands of faith, and has to grow much before it be matured. Or, to put it into more modern words, the evidence of Christianity, which past generations used to parade as being the strongest and the all-sufficient, is in reality the weakest and lowest kind of proof. The *word* itself, not the sign which accompanies it; the flashing of the lightning, and not the bellow of the thunder, should be the means of commending the truth. And only the faith which grasps the substance of the message, and says, "I believe that because of what it is," is the faith which Scripture recognises as adequate and lofty.

This confession was not only inadequate in its substance and imperfect in its grounds, but it was not altogether satisfactory in its temper. Why did he come at night? Either because he was frightened, or because he was ashamed. He seems to have been but a timid soul at the best; for, at a much subsequent period, and when, as we may suppose, he was more conclusively and thoroughly a disciple of Jesus Christ, he did not venture to open his mouth, and stand up in the Sanhedrim and say before them all, "*I* believe in Him." But all that he could do was to suggest certain considerations in arrest of hasty proceedings, carefully suppressing the fact that he himself was a disciple. And even at the very end it was only when he was heartened by the example of a stronger and

braver brother, Joseph of Arimathea, that he ventured to unite himself with him in the request for the body of Jesus. No doubt he was also ashamed that he, a rabbi, a member of the Sanhedrim, high in place and reputation, with all the legitimate sources of theological knowledge open to him in the schools, should be coming to this peasant to get information. Again, there is an unpleasant smack of patronage about that "We know," as if he felt the full value of the certificate that he was giving to this new beginner, and as if he was not unaware of his condescension in coming down from his height. There is a kind of intellectual conceit, too, about the "We know." For whom was he speaking? Was there some little knot of rabbis that had sent him as a messenger to get further information; or was he—as is more probable, I think—giving utterance to the unspoken convictions that were fighting in the breast of the whole set of them? If, at this early day, these convictions existed, that makes more criminal their subsequent attitude, when, with equal confidence in their own infallibility, and equal assurance that what they thought was absolute truth, and was to be rammed down other people's throats because they thought it, they declared: "*We know* that this Man is a sinner"; and then, forgetting the alleged sweep of their knowledge, but equally confident in the absolute correctness of their judgment, said further: "*We know not* from whence He is"—and what *we* do not know is not to be known!

A creed which says "Christ is a Teacher," and stops there, and which patronizes Him to some extent by recognizing the irregular wisdom that gleams in His words, and supposes that its knowledge is a line

deep enough to go to the bottom of the bottomless, and that what it does not know is not to be known—such a creed did not cease to haunt Christianity when Nicodemus passed away. We can recall teachers and writers of no mean repute who take up exactly this position, pay compliments to the Galilean peasant, speak about the elevation of His teaching, and withal do it with such a smack of intellectual self-sufficiency as declares that they, the certifiers, think themselves to be at least upon a level with Him, the certificated. Perhaps the cultivated mind of modern Europe, and the enlightenment of this enlightened day, do not fathom the unfathomable after all. It is just possible that there may be more in Jesus Christ than these people's eyes have seen. I would even venture the heresy of saying that a trim, compact Christianity, which will have no terms kept with mystery, and knows that Jesus Christ is a Teacher and nothing more, by its very freedom from everything that is not utterly plain and intelligible to the most cursory eye writes its own condemnation. Whatever may be true about Him, that cannot be true, because it is so shallow.

II.—I ask you to look, secondly, at the deeper view of man's need which convicts this conception of Christ of inadequacy.

Jesus answered, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That saying answers Nicodemus' thoughts. It meets the whole conception of what the kingdom of God was to be, and what sort of a leader He was to be that brought it, which underlay the inadequate confession of which I have been speaking. Without entering

into questions, interesting as they might be in their place, which would take us much too far away from our present subject, as to the full significance and manifold applications of that great phrase, "the kingdom of God"; and whether "seeing" and "entering" it are equivalent. I just notice that the kingdom of God must be, whatever else it be, a state or condition in which a society of men obey absolutely the sovereign will of God. The idea of the rule of that Divine will over men's wills is the fundamental notion expressed in this Scriptural phrase, "the kingdom of God." And Christ's doctrine here, in so far as it answers Nicodemus' confession, is just this in effect—"Ah! Men want something a great deal more thorough than a teacher before they can pass into a state of obedience to the sovereign will of God. For true submission to Him, for the realization, therefore, of the very destiny of humanity, and for the possession and enjoyment of true blessedness and peace, it is not a teacher that will serve your turn. You want something else than that."

This declaration of the inadequacy of mere instruction to do what men must have done for them, in order that they may pass into God's kingdom, is the answer to all such imperfect and fragmentary conceptions of Christ's nature as have just been expressed by Nicodemus. There must be a thorough radical change in humanity before it becomes part of the true kingdom of God. Christ bases that upon the veritable fact that the will of man is alienated from the will of God and that, from generation to generation, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the alienation is transmitted from parent to child.

Therefore there must be something else and other than Teacher, if men are to come to obedience to the will of God. The deepest need of man is not to know but to be helped to do. There must be a new birth, a new life. Ludicrously inadequate to the necessities of the case are representations which confine the Divine intervention to the sending of a Teacher, however perfect a revealer of truth, however absolute and complete. The worst man knows more than the best man practises. And if we are to get no help but larger knowledge and clearer instruction, we shall never be able either to see or enter the kingdom of God. You cannot put out Vesuvius with a teaspoonful of cold water. And you cannot make a man fit to be a subject of the kingdom of God by any gospel of which the ultimate word is teaching. You need something far more radical and thorough, even the communication of a new life.

III.—Notice the only means by which this necessity can be met.

Nicodemus' question to our Lord, in response to that declaration of the needs of the case, is by no means so foolish as it is often represented to be. It falls into two halves. "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" The second part of it shows that he correctly regarded our Lord's saying as being figurative; and the first part was the most appropriate question that he could ask. He recognizes the necessity; at least he does not contest it; he says, in effect, "I admit that teaching will not meet the needs. We want something more than that; we want a radical change of the man's nature. The

point is, how are we to get the radical change?" And our Lord answers that for us in that profound set of sayings of which I can only touch the salient points. The recognition of the necessity for a radical moral change and new beginning of life, as the condition of seeing the kingdom, seems to Nicodemus to be equivalent to shutting the door of hope by making that necessary which is impossible. His question as to *how* it can be is almost a denial *that* it can be, and has a tone of despair as well as of interrogation. And Jesus Christ answers, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Without the Divine Spirit there can be no new life for men; without new life there will be no entrance into the kingdom.

Now I am not going to enter upon minute observations as to the details of our Lord's words here. I only point out that "water and the Spirit" seems to me to be a phrase in entire parallelism with John the Baptist's similar phrase, "the Holy Ghost and fire," two symbolical elements, however different in the two cases, bearing the same relation in each to the Spirit with whom they are associated, and each expressing the same idea of a purifying and cleansing power. At all events, whether there be any reference to baptism or no, in the "water and the Spirit" it is clear that "the Spirit" is the essential factor, for in the immediately subsequent repetition of the phrase our Lord omits all mention of the water, and dwells only upon "the Spirit." That is to say, if men are to live a new life, it is God who must vitalise them. They cannot create it for themselves or for one another. The law remains, "like begets like"; the stream cannot rise

IV.—The answer is, fourthly, the full conception of Jesus Christ which meets all the necessities of the case.

I cannot do more than grasp the one central point in the subsequent words of our Lord. It lies in the declaration of the deepest and the highest truth, concerning, first, His person, and, second, His work. He is not "a Teacher sent from God." "He is the Son of God who came down from Heaven." His task is not to impart instruction, but to communicate everlasting life. His place of power is not the rabbi's throne, but the Cross. He was lifted up there that He might destroy the poison, in the likeness of which He suffered. The sinless Son became sin for us; and died upon the Cross that life might come to men. This is the true thought of Him. None of your shallow, inadequate conceptions of Him as a Teacher, but as the Divine and dying Son of Man, to whom men must cling if they are to get any real blessing from Him. He does reveal, but He does more than reveal. He did not come to *say*, He came to *be*, and to *do*. He did not come to teach, but He came to minister and to die. And in that ministration and death there lie, not only lessons of the deepest truth, but the powers of the mightiest renovation, and of new life for men.

So, brethren, I beseech you, ask yourselves whether our own experience of our own characters, and our observations of the characters of others, do not confirm this central thought with which our Lord seeks to deepen this man's conception of Him—viz., that, if ever we are to enter the kingdom of God, we want to be radically changed; that if we are thus to

be partakers of the new life, it can only be by the operation of the Divine Spirit; and that our only means of receiving such a Divine Spirit lies in our simple faith in the Christ who is the Teacher indeed, but who is the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Old legends tell us of one who came from the abode of the gods, with a spark of Divine fire hidden in a hollow reed. Christ has come from the throne, with the fiery life which He will give to all that trust Him, hidden in the frail reed of His manhood. If we will take Him for ours, He will give us of that life by His Spirit, and the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ will make us free—and nothing else will—from the law of sin and death. Do not cling to the half-eclipsed "Christ," a "Teacher sent from God," but open all the windows of your heart to the light and life of the full-orbed Son of God and Son of Man, who will give to all that trust Him eternal life.

XV.

The Lowliness and Loftiness of Jesus.

"JESUS saith unto her, Give Me to drink."
"Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He."—JOHN iv. 7, 26.

THIS evangelist very significantly sets side by side our Lord's conversations with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria. The persons are very different; the one a learned rabbi of reputation, influence, and large theological knowledge of the then fashionable kind; the other an alien woman, poor—for she had to do this menial task of water-drawing in the heat of the day—and of questionable character.

The diversity of persons necessitates great differences in the form of our Lord's address to each; but the resemblances are as striking as the divergences. In both we have His method of gradually unveiling the truth to a susceptible soul, beginning with symbol and a hint, gradually enlarging the hint and translating the symbol; and finally unveiling Himself as the Giver and the Gift. There is another resemblance; in both the characteristic gift is that of the Spirit of Life, and, perhaps, in both the symbol is the same. For we read in one of "water and the Spirit"; and in

the other of the fountain within, springing into everlasting life. However that may be, the process of teaching is all but identical in substance in both cases, though in form so various.

The words of our Lord's which I have taken for our text now are his first and last utterance in this conversation. What a gulf lies between! They are linked together by the intervening sayings, and constitute with these a great ladder, of which the foot is fast on earth, and the top fixed in heaven. On the one hand, He owns the lowest necessities; on the other, He makes the highest claims. Let us ponder on this remarkable juxtaposition, and try to gather the lessons that are plain in it.

I.—First, then, I think we see here the mystery of the dependent Christ.

"Give Me to drink." "I am He." Try to see the thing for a moment with the woman's eyes. She comes down from her little village, up amongst the cliffs on the hillside, across the narrow, hot valley, beneath the sweltering sunshine reflected from the bounding mountains, and she finds, in the midst of the lush vegetation round the ancient well, a solitary, weary Jew, travel-worn, evidently exhausted—for His disciples had gone away to buy food, and He was too wearied to go with them—looking into the well, but having no dipper or vessel by which to get any of its cool treasure. We lose a great deal of the meaning of Christ's request if we suppose that it was merely a way of getting into conversation with the woman, a "breaking of the ice." It was a great deal more than that. It was the utterance of a felt and painful necessity, which He Himself could not supply without

a breach of what He conceived to be His filial dependence. He could have brought water out of the well. He did not need to depend upon the pitcher that the disciples had unthinkingly carried away with them when they went to buy bread. He did not need to ask the woman to give, but He chose to do so. We lose much if we do not see in this incident far more than the woman saw, but we lose still more if we do not see what she did see. And the words which the Master spoke to her are no mere way of introducing a conversation on religious themes; but He asked for a draught which He needed, and which He had no other way of getting.

So, then, here stands, pathetically set forth before us, our Lord's true participation in two of the distinguishing characteristics of our weak humanity—subjection to physical necessities and dependence on kindly help. We find Him weary, hungry, thirsty, sometimes slumbering. And all these instances are documents and proofs for us that He was a true man like ourselves, and that, like ourselves, He depended on "the woman that ministered to Him" for the supply of His necessities; and so knew the limitations of our social and else helpless humanity.

But then a wearied and thirsty man is nothing of much importance. But here is a man who *humbled Himself* to be weary and to thirst. The keynote of this gospel, the one thought which unlocks all its treasures, and to the elucidation of which, in all its aspects, the whole book is devoted, is, "The Word was made flesh." Only when you let in the light of the last utterance of our text, "I that speak unto thee am He," do we understand the pathos, the sublimity,

the depth, and blessedness of meaning which lies in that first one, "Give Me to drink." When we see that He bowed Himself, and willingly stretched out His hands for the fetters, we come to understand the significance of these traces of His manhood. The woman says, with wonder, "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me?" and that was wonderful. But, as He hints to her, if she had known more clearly who this Person, that seemed to be a Jew, was, a deeper wonder would have crept over her spirit. The wonder is that the Eternal Word should need the water of the well, and should ask it of a poor human creature.

And why this humiliation? He could, as I have said, have wrought a miracle. He that fed five thousand; He that had turned water into wine at the rustic marriage-feast, would have had no difficulty in quenching His thirst if He had chosen to use His miraculous power therefor. But He here shows us that the true filial spirit will rather die than cast off its dependence on the Father. And the same motive which led Him to reject the temptation in the wilderness, and to answer with sublime confidence, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God," forbids Him here to use other means of securing the draught that He sc needed than the appeal to the sympathy of an alien, and the swift compassion of a woman's heart.

And then, let us remember that the motive of this willing acceptance of the limitations and weaknesses of humanity is, in the deepest analysis, simply His love to us; as the mediæval hymn has it, "Seeking me, Thou sattest weary."

In that lonely traveller, worn, exhausted, thirsty, craving for a draught of water from a stranger's hand, is set forth "the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth." A strange manifestation of Divine glory this! But if we understand that the glory of God is the lustrous light of His self-revealing love, perhaps we shall understand how, from that faint, craving voice, "Give me to drink," that glory sounds forth more than in the thunders that rolled about the rocky peak of Sinai. Strange to think, brethren, that the voice from those lips, dry with thirst, which was low and weak, was the voice that spoke to the sea, "Peace, be still," and there was a calm; that said to demons, "Come out of him," and they evacuated their fortress; that cast its command into the grave of Lazarus, and he came forth; and which one day all that are in the grave shall hear, and hearing shall obey. "Give me to drink." "I that speak unto thee am He."

II.—Secondly, we may note here the self-revealing Christ.

The process by which He gradually unveils His full character to this woman, so unspiritual and unsusceptible as she appeared at first sight to be, is interesting and instructive. It would occupy too much of your time for me to do more than set it before you in the barest outline. Noting the singular divergence between the two sayings which I have taken as our text, it is interesting to notice how the one gradually merges into the other. First of all, Jesus Christ, as it were, opens a finger of His hand to let the woman have a glimpse of the gift lying there, that that may kindle desire and hints at some occult depth in His person and nature all

undreamed of by her yet, and which would be the occasion of greater wonder, and of a reversal of their parts if she knew it. Then, in answer to her, half understanding that He meant more than met the ear, and yet opposing the plain physical difficulties that were in the way, in that He had "nothing to draw with, and the well is deep," and asking whether He were greater than our father Jacob, who also had given, and given not only a draught, but the well, our Lord enlarges her vision of the blessedness of the gift, though He says but little more of its nature, except in so far as that may be gathered from the fact that the water that He will give will be a permanent source of satisfaction, forbidding the pangs of unquenched desire ever again to be felt as pangs; and the other fact that it shall be an inward possession, leaping up with a fountain's energy, and a life within itself, towards, and into everlasting life. Next, He strongly assails conscience and demands repentance, and reveals Himself as the Reader of the secrets of the heart. Then He discloses the great truths of spiritual worship. And, finally, as a prince in disguise might do, He flings aside the mantle of which He had let a fold or two be blown back in the previous conversation, and stands confessed. "I that speak unto thee am He." That is to say, the kindling of desire, the proffer of the all-satisfying gift, the quickening of conscience, the revelation of a Father to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and the final full disclosure of His person and office as the Giver of the gift which shall slake all the thirsts of men; these are the stages of His self-revelation.

Then, note, not only the process, but the substance

of the revelation of Himself. The woman had a far more spiritual and lofty conception of the office of Messiah than the Jews had. It is not the first time that heretics have reached a loftier ideal of some parts of the truth than the orthodox do. To the Jew the Messiah was a conquering king, who would help them to ride on the necks of their enemies, and pay back their persecutions and oppressions. To this Samaritan woman—speaking, I suppose, the conceptions of her race—the Messias was One who was to "tell us all things."

Jesus Christ accepts the position, endorses her anticipations, and in effect presents Himself before her and before us as the Fountain of all certitude and knowledge in regard to spiritual matters. For all that we can know, or need to know, with regard to God and man and their mutual relations; all that we can or need know in regard to manhood, its ideal, its obligations, its possibilities, its destinies; for all that we need to know of men in their relation to one another, we have to turn to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who "will tell us all things." He is the fountain of light; He is the foundation of certitude; and they who seek, not hypotheses and possibilities and conjectures and dreams, but the solid substance of a reliable knowledge must grasp Him, and esteem the words of His mouth and the deeds of His life more than their necessary food.

He meets this woman's conceptions as He had met those of Nicodemus. To him He had unveiled Himself as the Son of God, and the Son of Man who came down from Heaven, and is in Heaven, and ascends to Heaven. To the woman He reveals

with our infirmities, and yet sweet and gracious and good and pure, be true to what you know, and put it into practice, and be ready to accept all the light that dawns. They that begin down at the bottom with "Give me to drink," may stand at the top, and hear Him speak to them His unveiled truth and His full glory. "To him that hath shall be given." If any man wills to do His will he shall "know of the teaching."

III.—Lastly, we have here the universal Christ.

The woman wondered that, being a Jew, He spoke to her. As I have said, our Lord's first utterance is simply the expression of a real physical necessity. But it is none the less what the woman felt it to be, a strange overleaping of barriers that towered very high. A Samaritan, a woman, a sinner, is the recipient of the first clear confession from Jesus Christ of His Messiahship and dignity. She was right in her instinct that something lay behind His sweeping aside of the barriers, and coming so close to her with His request. These two, the prejudices of race and the contempt for woman, two of the crying evils of the old world, were overpassed by our Lord as if He never saw them. They were too high for men's puny limbs; they made no obstacle to the march of His Divine compassion. And therein lies a symbol if you like, but none the less a prophecy that will be fulfilled, of the universal adaptation and destination of the Gospel, and its independence of all distinctions of race and sex, condition, moral character. In Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, neither bond nor free, ye "are all one in Christ." If He had been but a Jew it was wonderful that He should talk

to a Samaritan. But there is nothing in the character and life of Christ, as recorded in Scripture, more remarkable and more plain than the entire absence of any racial peculiarities, or of characteristics owing to His position in space or time. So unlike His nation was He that the very *élite* of His nation snarled at Him and said: "Thou art a Samaritan!" So unlike them was He that one feels that a character so palpitatingly human to its core, and so utterly unlike its surroundings, is inexplicable but on the New Testament theory that He is not a Jew, a man only, but the Son of Man, the Divine embodiment of the ideal of humanity, Whose dwelling was on earth, but His origin and home in the bosom of God. Therefore Jesus Christ is the world's Christ, your Christ, my Christ, everybody's Christ, the Tree of Life that stands in the midst of the garden, that all men may draw near to it and gather of its fruit.

Brother, answer His proffer of the gift as this woman did: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not"; neither go all the way to the world's broken cisterns to draw; and He will put into your hearts that indwelling fountain of life, so that you may say, like this woman's townspeople: "Now we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

XVI.

The Universal Burden and its Bearer.

"THE Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."—ISAIAH liii. 6.

THE Ethiopian statesman asked, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" One at least of his suppositions has been gravely adopted, and "some other man" been suggested as pointed at by the prophet. It has also been maintained that we have here an ideal picture of the righteous Israel in its relation to the rest of the world and to God. But I suppose that these solutions would generally be admitted to be failures, and that the wonderful picture of the suffering servant of God in this great chapter would generally be recognised as a portrait of an individual. If it be that, there is only one Individual in history of whom it is a likeness. The life and death of Jesus Christ—lived and died five hundred years after the very latest date to which anyone has assigned this prophecy—fit it feature by feature, tint by tint, as nothing else can. And the minute external correspondences between the prophet's vision and the Gospel story, important as these literal resemblances are, are mainly important as pointing onwards to the complete correspondence between the spirit and

functions of the suffering servant of the prophecy and of the Jesus Christ of the Gospel history.

Now it is of prime importance to mark that the only office, if I may so say, which the prophet describes the Servant as filling is the function of suffering. He is neither Teacher, nor Conqueror, nor Lawgiver, nor, here, King; He is only a Sufferer. That is what the Saviour of the world has to be, first of all. The rabbis have a legend, far wiser than most of their follies, which tells how Messias is to be found sitting amongst the lepers at the gate of the city. The fable has in it the deep truth that He who saves the world must suffer with, and for, the world that He saves.

So I ask you to look at these great words of my text, in which the whole of this aspect of the Saviour's work is gathered into one pathetic symbol, "The Lord has made to light upon Him the iniquity of us all."

I.—Consider, then, first, the universal burden.

Of course, the speakers in my text are primarily the penitent Jewish nation, who at last have learned how much at first they had misunderstood the Servant of the Lord. But the "we" and the "all" of our text may very fairly be widened out so as to include the whole world, and every individual of the race. Iniquity is the universal burden of us all.

The fact that every man is a transgressor of the law of God is the prime fact of humanity, and the all-important truth needed for the apprehension of the very rudiments of the Gospel. We shall never know what we need, nor be able to understand what Christianity, as gathered in Christ—who is Christianity—offers to do for us, unless our eyes are opened and our consciences made sensitive, to the unwelcome but

undeniable truth, that we all "have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

I believe that almost all of the mistaken and unworthy conceptions of Christianity which have afflicted and do afflict the world are directly traceable to this—the failure to apprehend the radical fact affecting men's condition that they are all sinful, and therefore separated from God.

And so, dear brethren, knowing nothing at all about most of you, having never looked many of you in the face before, and very likely never being destined to any closer acquaintance with you, I come to you now to try to press upon you, to begin with, as the preliminary to all right understanding of Christian truth, and to our true attitude in regard to it, this fact, common to you and to me and to all our brethren, that we are all on the one platform of sinful men who have departed from the law and ways of God, and have thereby drawn down ruin upon ourselves.

There are differences immensely important in other respects between us, differences of culture, of talent, of opportunity; differences of outward life: some of us living respectable, decent, cleanly lives, full of many virtues and many graces; some of us, perhaps—for in such a multitude as are here gathered to night it is all but certain that there must be some—having done many a thing that, if it did not bring them within the grip of criminal law, at least sets them outside the decent, respectable classes of society. But, whatever may be the superficial differences, down below there is identity; and beneath all varieties of garb and vesture, and all diversities of culture, intelligence

profession, and all differences of degrees of civilization and of rank and position, wise man and fool, cultured man and savage, saint and criminal, loftiest and lowliest, all are alike in this, that they have sinned.

If there be any here to-night who have resisted convictions that have been working in their hearts, I pray that my rough, plain, poor words may reach them. It is no mere pulpit rhetoric in which I am indulging; and I am not speaking simply for the sake of thundering wrath over your heads, or of producing sensational effects, when I ask you to go into the dark chambers of your own hearts and to look how passions have rioted there, how the lusts of the flesh in some of us have darkened the light of the Spirit, how in all of us the word has been true even at our best and purest, "The God in whose hands thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified." You are at the bar, whether you know it or not, and God calls you to plead guilty or not guilty to this universal indictment, "all"—and therefore *thou*—"have sinned." Sin is the universal burden.

But, further, the evil that we do, going forth from us as deed, comes back upon us as guilt. Flung up, as it were, into the heavens, it falls back again on the head of the man that cast it. And so my text speaks of a recoil of the evil. "The Lord hath made to fall upon" some one "the iniquity" that had been audaciously cast up in the face of the heavens, as in scorn. "If 'twere done when 'tis done 'twere well 'twere done quickly," but seeing that it only *begins* when "'tis *done*," it is an awful thing to commit the smallest evil. The recoil of the gun bruises blue the shoulder of the man that fires it; and all our evil deeds, according to

the old proverb about curses, "come home to roost." There is guilt, and there is habit, and there is the uneasy, or worse, the silent and seared conscience; and there is the disturbance of the relation to God, and there is the flight of peace from the heart, and there is the onward look that says, "If there is a future it is a future of retribution, and every transgression and disobedience shall receive its *just* recompense of reward." Is not that a burden for us to carry?—the weight of evil pressing upon us, in its consequences, of guilt, disturbance, irritated or paralyzed conscience, and the foreboding that if we get what we deserve we shall get but a bitter weird. "Bread eaten in secret is pleasant," but it turns to gravel that breaks the teeth of the eater.

And so, dear brother and friend, we are all staggering under this burden. We forget it, we deny it, we will not look over our shoulders to see how big it is, we try to find refuge and rest in all manner of palliations and excesses, but there the fact remains, and those of you who are least aware of the weight that is pressing upon you are the most weighed down by it. The creatures that live at the bottom of the doleful sea, fathoms deeper than plummet has ever sounded, have to bear a pressure upon their frames all inconceivable by us men who walk upon the surface of the earth. And the deeper a man goes in the dark ocean of wrongdoing and wrongbeing, the heavier the weight of the compressed atmosphere above him, crushing him in. And yet, like those creatures that crawl on the slime, miles down in the dreary sea, where no light has come, they know not the weight that rests upon them, and never have dreamed of

how blessed it is to walk in the lighter air with the sun shining above them. There are some of you, grovelling down at the bottom of the ocean, to whom the liberty and illumination, the lightness and light-someness of the pure life which is possible, would seem miraculous.

Now, dear brethren, if these things which I have thus imperfectly touched upon be at all true, then it seems to me that the fact of universal sinfulness, with all its necessary, natural, and inevitable consequences, must be the all-important fact about a man. What we think about sin will settle all our religious ideas. If we pooh-pooh it, then we shall not want a Saviour. A man that will say wise things to us will serve our turn. If we rightly understand how heavy the burden is, and how impotent we are to get rid of it, then we shall not be ready to believe in the doctrine of every man his own redeemer, but we shall want, not merely a Saviour that talks to us, however wise and sweet and tender may be His words, or a Saviour that walks before us an embodied realization of the ideal humanity, but we shall want a Saviour that does something for us, and puts out of the way, somehow or other, that black load under which we are staggering. The appeal to the understanding is less powerful to bring men to a perception of Christ's redeeming work than that to the conscience. Once get a man to feel, as I pray God that you may feel, "I am a sinful man in Thy sight," and his heart will cry out for one who shall be to him all that no human being can be, even the Lord of his salvation and the Deliverer from his burden. What we think about our own sin will settle the form of our religious belief.

II.—And so, in the second place, I ask you to look at the one bearer of the burden.

"The Lord hath made to light upon Him the iniquity of us all." Now I want you to observe that, in the compass of three verses of this chapter, there are seven distinct, emphatic, and harmonious utterances, all bearing on the one thought of the vicarious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hearken!

(1) "He hath borne our griefs." (2) "And carried our sorrows." (3) "He was wounded for our transgressions." (4) "He was bruised for our iniquities." (5) "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him." (6) "With His stripes we are healed." And they are all gathered together in the final word of my text—"The Lord hath made to light upon Him the iniquity of us all."

I venture to say that if these words, in the variety of their metaphor and the fulness of their description, do not teach the gospel that Jesus Christ bore in His sufferings the sins of the whole world, and bore them away, language has no meaning. Nothing could be more emphatic, nothing more reiterated, full, and confident than this sevenfold presentation of the great truth that He lived and suffered and died for us because He suffered and died instead of us.

"The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all." He bore the burden. I am not going to argue; my business is to preach to-night; and, as I have said, if your consciences have at all grasped the gravity and depth of the fact of your own individual sinfulness, you want little more to predispose you to the joyful acceptance of that thought that the burden

may be lifted off your shoulders and laid on One who is mighty to save. Jesus Christ bore our sicknesses and our pains, according to the first of these sevenfold utterances, and one of our evangelists gives us at least one aspect in which that is true, when he points to His sympathy with men's physical necessities, and how, by taking these into the hands of His sympathy, He relieves the sufferers from them. All through that pure and lovely life He knit Himself most closely by the might of a sympathy, all the fuller because of His purity, to the most impure and sinful of men. Only those who have known what innocence suffers in compelled association with vice can, however faintly even they may do it, imagine what it was to Jesus Christ to walk amongst men with that righteous soul vexed with the evil around Him, as we might feel the touch of some rough and hard substance if the toughened skin of our palms were stripped off them. It was pain to Christ to sympathize. It was pain to Christ to dwell amongst men. His healing was done at the cost of sorrows; He wept before He could say, "Lazarus! Come forth!" He sighed ere He could say, "Eph pha tha! be opened!" No tear that He wiped away on earth but appealed to the fountain of tears within Himself; and no sorrow that He comforted but Himself bore. For is it not always the case that we must feel the evil we alleviate? and can any man be a comforter and a helper except at the price of taking into his own consciousness and experience the sorrows that he would alleviate? Much more, the one brother of us all, who has entered into relations with every human heart, had to bear, by that which in Him we almost degrade when we call it by the

hackneyed name of sympathy, the burdens that He bore away.

But turn for a moment from the sweet mysteries of His healing and comforting life to the darker mysteries of its close, and there see in how real, how tragic, how awful, and how unique a fashion the load of sin was laid on Jesus Christ. I know of no theory which redeems the story of Gethsemane and Calvary from the charge of being the history of a man whose courage collapsed when it came to be tested, except that which sees in the agony beneath the olives, in the bloody sweat, in the awful and pathetic words with which He appealed to His friends: "My soul is compassed about with sorrows even unto death," an element far more mysterious and awful than the mere shrinking of humanity from death. Surely, surely, the Lord and the Master, in the strength of whose name feeble women and tremulous virgins and little children have gone to the pyre and the scaffold and the lions, as to a feast, did not exhibit all that agitation and tremor and shrinking, only because He was afraid of the death that belongs to all men. Ask yourselves how reverence for Jesus Christ will survive in the face of the story of His last hours, unless, as we listen to Him crying, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me," we hear the cry of Him who before His shearers was dumb, but opened His mouth at last in that mysterious complaint in which filial obedience and utter desolation are so strangely blended, because "the Lord hath made to light on Him the iniquity of us all"? The icy waters of that baptism with which He was baptized were fed from the black fountains of human corruption, and the only

explanation of the fact of Christ's passion is found in the recognition that therein He was bearing the sins of the whole world.

Remember that although my text speaks of that burden as being laid upon Him by the Lord, we are not to suppose that, therefore, it was not assumed by Him by His own loving volition. He bore our sins because He would. The Lord laid them upon Him; therefore the sacrifice appointed by God is accepted of God; but He chose to suffer, and He willed to die, because he loved thee, and me, and every soul of sinful men. There is the secret of the power of the Gospel. Brethren, a Christianity without a Christ whose death is the world's light and life, is a Christianity without power.

We hear a great deal to-day about the social side of Christian truth, and about the application of the principles of Christianity to the masses, with all of which I am in the fullest accord. Only let us begin where the Bible begins, and it begins with the sacrifice which heals the individual conscience. It is of no use to tinker at men's miseries unless you deal with men's sins; and there is only one thing that deals with men's sins, and that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is of no use beginning with masses, begin with the individual. It is of no use preaching the applications of the Christian system to social life, unless you have laid deep the foundations which the Bible lays—Jesus Christ died for every man, and in His death has taken away the guilt and penalty and broken the power of sin. Begin there, and all else will follow. Begin anywhere else, and you will be like a man that commences his house at the chimney instead of the

foundation; you will never build anything that will stand.

III.—And so, lastly, mark the men that are freed from the burden.

"He hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all." Yes! and yet it is possible for a man included in the "all" to have to stagger along through life under his burden, and to carry it with him when he goes hence. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked," says the foremost preacher of the doctrine that Christ's death takes away sin. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Ever man shall bear his own burden." So your sins, taken away as they are by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, may yet cling to you and crush you. There is only one way, dear brethren, by which the possibilities open to all men by the death of Jesus Christ may become the actual experience of every man, or of any man—and that is, the simple laying your burden, by your own act of quiet trust, upon the shoulders of Him that is mighty to save.

I suppose it is not fashionable now to read "Pilgim's Progress"—more's the pity! But you remember, I daresay, enough of it to know where the pilgrim got rid of his burden—viz., at the Cross. Dear friend, a weight far too heavy for you to carry will cleave to you like a clinging curse, and will crush you down at last. The burden of sin, the burden of guilt, the burden of an evil conscience, the burden of separation from God which is the true death, the burden of future judgment—is your back fit to carry all that? Well, then, why do you not turn yourself to Him and say—

My soul looks back to see
  The burden Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the cursèd tree,
  And knows her guilt was there.

Most of you know that strange and infinitely pathetic picture that represents the Jewish scapegoat, panting, wounded, ready to die, on the salt margin of the sea of Death, whither it has been hounded, with the sins of a nation upon its head. The solitude, the sorrow, the suffering of Jesus Christ are faintly shadowed by that. Lay your hand on the head of the Sacrifice, and say, "Behold! I put my sin where God has put it, on the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!"

XVII.

The Fountain of Life and the River.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John iii. 16.

I SUPPOSE many of you, like me, learned these words at your mother's knees, and have been familiar with them all your lives. Perhaps familiarity has dimmed their wonderfulness. The child that knows them knows more than, without them, the wisest could have conceived, or heaven, with all its angels, have expected. They are inexhaustible, and one shrinks from taking them as a text. And yet, though I know that my poor paraphrase can only weaken them, they contain so fully and completely the message which it is my desire to press upon your acceptance that I venture to do it. If I might fall back upon a metaphor, we have here the fountain-head, the love of God; the stream, the gift of Christ; the act of drinking, "whosoever believeth"; and the life-giving effects of the draught.

These great words begin in the heart of God; they end with a quickened world; and the links between

the beginning and the ending are, on the Divine side, Christ, and on the human, faith.

I.—I ask you, then, to look, first, at the fountain-head, the universal love of God.

"God . . . loved the world." In these words there is the most wonderful apocalypse of the Divine nature that ever has been or shall be made. One knows not which thought is the more stupendous, that *God loves*, or that He loves *the world*.

"God loves." Where, outside of Christianity, does anybody dare to say that as a certainty? Men have hoped it; men have feared that it could not be; men have dimly dreamed and strongly doubted; men have had gods cruel, gods lustful, gods capricious, gods good-natured, gods indifferent or apathetic, but a *loving* God is the discovery of Christianity. Neither the gross deities of heathenism, nor the shadowy god of Theism, nor the unknown somewhat, which, perhaps, makes for righteousness, of our modern agnostics, presents anything like this—"God loved."

Do not let us be afraid of attributing the likeness of human emotions to the Divine Being, nor be frightened from accepting the whole blessed consolation and enlightenment which lies in this wonderful thought, by any solemn warnings, lest we degrade the Divine nature by supposing it to be altogether like ourselves. The spectrum has taught us that the metals in the sun are absolutely identical with the metals in this earth. Christianity teaches us that since man is Deiform, made in the Divine image, we have the right to argue the other way, and say that God and man are sufficiently alike to make it perfectly reverent and safe for us to believe that there is in God that which

answers to love in us; separated and purified indeed from limitations, removed from the possibility of chill and change, but yet alive with all the tenderness of yearning, with all the sweetness, with all the capacity for affording rest to another heart which we find in human love at its best.

We speak of that great Divine nature as being infinite, and that is an awful word; as being eternal, and that is a tremendous and sometimes a chilling thought; as being infinitely righteous; as wielding almighty power. But all these things that men call Divine attributes are but the fringe of His character, the halo round the orb, of which the central blaze is love. The only way by which a poor, finite, sinful heart can venture to grasp the awful thoughts that lie in these great words, Infinitude, Eternity, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Purity, is to regard them as characteristics of love, and say, "Yes! God's love is infinite, is eternal, is omnipotent, is omniscient, is all righteous and pure."

But then, on the other side, we have not only the revelation of the heart of God, but we have the wonderful word which declares the universality of the sweep of that love, "God loved the world."

Now, I want you to observe particularly that this designation of the object upon which the Divine love rested and rests eternally is to be interpreted according to the usage of this Gospel, and that usage distinctly gives to the expression "the world" not only the meaning of the total of humanity, but also the further meaning of humanity separated by its own evil from God. And so we get, not only the statement of the universality of the love of God, but also this great

truth, that no sin nor unworthiness, no unfaithfulness nor rebellion, nothing which degrades humanity even to its lowest depths, and seems all but to extinguish the spark within it that is capable of being fanned into a flame, has the least power to deflect, turn back, or alter the love of God. That love falls upon "the world," the mass of men who have wrenched themselves away from Him, but cannot wrench Him away from themselves. They never can prevent His love from pouring itself over them; even as the bright waters of the ocean will break over some grim rock, black in the sunshine. So, brethren, all the outcasts, criminals, barbarians, degraded people, that the world consents to regard as irrevocably bad and hopeless, are all grasped in His love. And you and I and every soul of man have a place there; and my sins and your sins do not prevent His love from circling about us, and longing after us, and wanting to bless us and bring us back to Himself. "God loves the world," the whole mass of sinful men. Do you believe that? Do you believe it about yourself?

We lose in the depth of our love in proportion as it gains in breadth, and the sentiment, when it comes to be spread over a race is very thin. We generalize and classify. In order to get a conception of the whole we lose sight of the individuals. But there are no classes or masses with God, and when the Bible tells us that He loves the world, that does not mean a diffused sentiment that grasps the whole and is almost oblivious of the individuals, as it would be with us. But He loves the world because He loves each unit that composes it. Just as in the heavens each star is set in its place, and all are included in

the great arch that sweeps above them, and yet each is separate, so

> The glorious sky, embracing all,
> Is like the Maker's love,
> Wherewith, encompassed, great and small
> In peace and order move.

He loves all because He loves each. He loves the world because He loves me and thee and every single soul.

II.—Then note secondly the stream; the gift which proves the love.

"God so loved the world that He gave His . . . . Son." Mark that collocation of words, in the next verse, where the same subject is dealt with, a different expression is employed. There we read, "God sent His Son." But in my text, where the matter in hand is the love of God, *sent* is far too cold a word, and *gave* is used as congruous with *loved*. It must needs be that the Divine love manifest itself even as the human does by an infinite delight in bestowing. The very property and life of love, as we know it even in its tainted and semi-selfish forms as it prevails amongst us is to give, and the life of the Divine love is the same. He loves, and therefore He gives. His love is a longing to bestow Himself, and the proof and sign that He loves is that "He gave His only begotten Son."

I need not remind you, I suppose, of the allusion, obvious in the language of my text, to that wonderful story in Genesis of the sacrifice of Isaac. You remember how, when the patriarch's trial was over, the approbation was spoken from heaven in these words. "Now I know that thou fearest God because

thou hast not withheld thine only son from Me." And we can reverently turn to Him and say, "Now know we that Thou lovest us, because Thou has not withheld Thine only Son from us."

Ah, brethren, there is more in that word "gave" than a bestowment. There is a surrender in it, and there is a surrender to death. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all; how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" I venture to believe that we may be warranted even in the thought that something not altogether dissimilar to the surrender of his only son to death which wrung the heart of the ancient patriarch is conceivable within that infinite Divine nature that spared not His Son, but gave Him up for us all.

Is not that the one proof of God's love? Creation, indeed, is the consequence, and therefore the sign of a Divine love; and we shall never understand why it was that God made worlds at all, unless we have pierced to the depth of the grand psalm which says, "To Him that made great lights, for His mercy endureth for ever."

But whilst Nature is the outcome of the Divine love, its witness is all uncertain and broken. The harp was once tuned by a Divine hand, but rude fingers have been swept across it, and it is now "like sweet bells jangled, harsh and out of tune." And there is no place where a poor soul can be sure of the love of God except here, in sight of Calvary, on the Cross of which it recognizes the Son of God dying for the sins of the world. I feel as much as any pessimist or agnostic of them all, the burden and "the weary

weight of all this unintelligible world." I know, as clearly as any man does, and I do not think I feel it less than most men do, how

> Nature, red in tooth and claw,
> With rapine, shrieks against the creed

that God is love. But I believe in Jesus Christ and His Cross as the governing fact; and in the light of it it were folly and treason to doubt that all discords are capable of resolution into harmony; and that when the end comes we shall know what to-day, by that light, we are heartened to believe, that "God is in heaven, all's right with the world." "God so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son."

III.—Notice (and here I slightly alter the order of my text) the purpose of the gift that proves the love.

God so loved the world that He gave His Son in order that there might be escape from perishing and the possession of eternal life. Now here the one purpose of the gift—which is also the one longing of the love—is stated negatively and positively—"should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Now there are a great many people who would like to put the whole middle part of my text into a parenthesis, and bring together directly the first clause and the last, and say, "God so loved the world that everybody shall have eternal life, and nobody shall perish." But my text does not make such short work of it as that. It recognizes—and I wish to press upon you the recognition—that in order that the Divine love may reach its longing there must be a process; and that that process, looked at from the

Divine side, lies here, that God must send His Son if the world is not to perish; and looked at from the human side it lies here, that men must believe in the Son that is sent if they are to have eternal life.

There is then a danger which only the mission of Jesus Christ averts that men may perish. That is a danger which is as universal as the love of which I have been speaking, for it is "the world" that is in danger of perishing, and that is a danger which is as individualizing and specific as the love of which I have been speaking, for "the world" that "perishes" is made up of single souls that do. In that category you have a place, and I and all our brethren. Whoever stands in the great class of the objects of Divine love belongs also to the class of those who are in risk of destruction. Oh! dear friends, it does not become me to fling about the thunderbolts of God, or to threaten and lighten as He has the right to do; but I do believe that much of the preaching of this generation is toothless, impotent, unblessed, because men have got too falsely tender-hearted and sentimental to talk about the necessary issue of alienation from God. Be you sure of this, that in whatever form it may be realized—and that is of secondary importance—the world, and especially you that have heard the Gospel all your days, and are hearing it, however imperfectly, again to-night, stands in peril of destruction. "To perish," whether it mean to be reduced into non-being, or whether it mean, as I believe it means, to be so separated from the one Source of life as that, conscious existence continuing, everything that made life beautiful and blessed and desirable is gone—to "perish" is the necessary end

of the man who wrenches himself away from God. You may continue to be, you may exercise many of the functions of life, you may go through the world with a tough skin and an indurated conscience, as some of you are doing, but destruction, in the awfullest meaning of the word, is the fate of the man who has turned away from God manifest in Jesus Christ. And I should be a traitor to my own convictions and a cruel friend to you, dear friends, if I did not warn you, and pray to God that the warning may get to some of you that need it, that you are upon an inclined plane, and the inclined plane will stop and you will not; and where will you be then? There is only one Hand that can put the break on. There is only one way by which God's love can stop a man from going down the slippery slope. "God so loved the world that He sent His Son that the world should not perish." It is going to ruin without Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, comes in to arrest the necessary tendency downwards, and to substitute for it the motion upwards towards the light and the life.

But arresting is not all. "Should have eternal life." And what lies in that? Surely something a great deal more than the unending continuance of being. I do not know how you feel, but to me many a time the prospect of living for ever and ever, on and on and on, seems to be infinitely awful. And so it would be, unless eternal life meant something a great deal more than that, meant the fulness of purity, of peace, of energy, of love and wisdom and joy all flooding into our souls with the possession of Jesus Christ. Life eternal lies in union with God, and the

which we are constantly exercising to those who are dear to us, transferred to God. It does not seem to me that there is any mystery in it at all. People have talked very learnedly, "and darkened counsel by words without wisdom," and the continual, parrot-like repetition of the cry to men, "Faith, faith, faith," has deadened to a great many of you the beautiful clearness and simplicity of the Gospel.

The old message is perhaps freshened by using a good old word, and saying, "*Trust* Jesus Christ." That is all. Trust Him, of course, for that for which God sent Him—to die for you and all of us. Since it was impossible for the downward tendency to be arrested without Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ must have been the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, which took away their guilt and broke their power. And for my part I do not believe that faith in Jesus Christ means anything less than this, the trust of a sinful soul on Him as the only Saviour, because the only Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Note the simplicity, but note also the rigidity of the condition. And note that the same individualizing universality of which I have been speaking, in reference to other parts of my subject applies to these conditions. "Whosoever." Very well, you can run your pen through "whosoever," and write your own name over it. It is not exactly a blank cheque, but you can endorse it if you like, and then it will be paid.

Ah, dear friend! it is an awful power which we have of rendering God's love of no effect to us, and of thwarting His purpose of love. This fleece has power to repel the dew, and so to be bone-dry amidst the most refreshing showers.

You can make Christ worthless to you if you like. You can make God's love of no use to you in regard of the highest purposes which it contemplates and the deepest desires which it cherishes. "Whosoever believeth." What is the use of the fountain pulsing up through eternity in the deep heart of God? What is the use of the stream running broad and deep and life-giving—a true river of water of life close by your feet—if you lock your lips, and will not put your pitcher in. You will die of thirst whilst the water is rippling past your dying body. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "If any man thirst"—you, and you, and you, and I—"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."

XVIII.

The Servant-Master.

"JESUS knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."—JOHN xiii 3—5.

IT has been suggested that the dispute as to "which was the greatest," which broke the sanctities of the upper chamber, was connected with the unwillingness of each of the apostles to perform the menial office of washing the feet of his companions. They had come in from Bethany, and needed the service. But apparently it was omitted, and although we can scarcely suppose that the transcendent act which is recorded in my text was performed at the beginning of the meal, yet I think we shall not be wrong if we see in it a reference to the neglected service.

The Evangelist who tells us of the dispute, and does not tell us of the foot-washing, preserves a sentence which finds its true meaning only in this incident. "I am among you as He that serveth." And although John is the only recorder of this pathetic

incident, there are allusions in other parts of Scripture which seem to hint at it. As, for instance, when Paul speaks of "taking upon Him the form of a servant"; and still more strikingly when Peter employs the remarkable word, which he does employ in his exhortation, "Be ye clothed with humility." For the word rendered there "clothed" occurs only in that one place in Scripture, and means literally the "putting on" of a slave's costume. One can scarcely help, then, seeing in these three passages to which I have referred echoes of this incident which John alone preserves to us. And so we get at once a hint of the harmony and of the incompleteness of the Gospel records.

I.—Consider the motives of this act.

Now, that is ground upon which the Evangelists very seldom enter. They tell us what Christ did, but very rarely do they give us any glimpses into why He did it. But this section of the Gospel is remarkable for its full and careful analysis of Christ's impelling motives in the final acts of His life. How did John find out why Christ did this deed? Perhaps he who had leaned upon His bosom at supper, and was evidently very closely associated with Him, may, in some unrecorded hour of intimate communion during the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, have heard from the Master the exposition of His motives. But more probably, I think, the long years of growing likeness to his Lord, and of meditation upon the depth of meaning in the smallest events that his faithful memory recalled, taught him to understand Christ's meaning and motives, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and the liker we get to our Master and the more we are

filled with His Spirit, the more easy will it be for us to divine the purpose and motives of His actions, whether as they are recorded in the Scripture or as they come to us in the experience of daily life.

But, passing that point, I desire for a moment to fix your attention on the two-fold key to our Lord's action which is given in this context. There is, first of all, in the first verse of the chapter, a general exposition of what was uppermost in His mind and heart during the whole of the period in the upper room. The act in our text, and the wonderful words which follow in the subsequent chapters, crowned by that great intercessory prayer, seem to me to be all explained for us by this first unveiling of His motives, "When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

And then the words of my text, which apply more specifically to the single incident with which they are brought into connection, tell us in addition why this one manifestation of Christ's love was given. "Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God." There, then, are two explanations of motive, the one covering a wider area than the other, but both converging on the incident before us.

The first of these is just this—the consciousness of impending separation moved Christ to a more than ordinarily tender manifestation of His love. For the rendering which you will find in the margin of the Revised Version, "He loved them *to the uttermost*," seems to me to be truer to the Evangelist's meaning

than the other, "He loved them unto the end." For it was more to John's purpose to tell us that the approach of the Cross only brought to the surface in more blessed and wonderful representation the deep love of His heart, than simply to tell us that that approach did not stop its flow. It is much to know that all through His sorrow He continued to love; it is far more to know that the sorrow sharpened love's poignancy, and deepened its depth, and made more tender its tenderness.

How near to the man Christ that thought brings us! Do we not all know the impulse of making parting moments tender moments? The masks of use and wont drop off; the reticence which we, perhaps wisely, ordinarily cultivate in regard of our deepest feelings melts away. We yearn to condense all our unspoken love into some one word, act, look, or embrace which it may afterwards be life to two hearts to remember. And Jesus Christ felt this. Because He was going, He could not but pour out Himself yet more completely than in the ordinary tenour of His life. The earthquake lays bare hidden veins of gold, and the heart opens itself out when separation impends. We shall never understand the works of Jesus Christ if we do as we are all apt to do, think of them only as having a didactic and doctrinal purpose. We must remember that there is in Him the true play of a human heart, and that it was to relieve His own love as well as to teach these men their duty, that He rose from the supper, and prepared Himself to wash the disciples' feet.

Then, on the other hand, the other motive which is brought by the Evangelist more immediately into

connection with this incident is, "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God."

The consciousness of the highest dignity impels to the lowliest submission. "All things given into His hands," means universal and absolute dominion. "That He was come from God," means pre-existence, voluntary incarnation, an eternal Divine nature and unbroken communion with the Father. "That He went to God," means a voluntary departure from this low world, and a return to "His own calm home, His habitation from eternity."

And gathered all together, they mean the absolute and unconditional consciousness of His Divine nature. It was that that sent Him with a towel round His loins to wash the foul feet of the pedestrians who had come by the dusty and hot way from Bethany, and through all the abominations of an Eastern city, unto the upper chamber.

This was He who from the beginning "was with God, and was God." This was He who was the Lord of Death, Victor over the grave. This was He who by His own power ascended up on high, and reigns on the Throne of the universe to-day. This was He whose breast the same Evangelist had seen, before he wrote his gospel, "girded with the golden girdle" of priesthood and of sovereignty; and holding, in the hands that had laid the towel on the disciples' feet, the seven stars.

Oh! brethren, if we believed our creeds, how our hearts would melt with wonder and awe that He who was so high stooped so low! "Knowing that He came from God, and went to God," and that even

And may we not also say it is a parable, or illustration, on a lower level, of the very same principles which were at work in the mightier fact of the greater condescension of His becoming flesh and dwelling among us?

He "rose from the table," as He rose from His place "in the bosom of the Father." He disturbed the meal as He broke the festivities of the heavens. He divested Himself of His garments, as He thought not equality with God a thing to be worn eagerly; and "He girded Himself with the towel," as He put on the weakness of flesh. Himself He filled the basin, by His own work providing the means of cleansing; and Himself applied the cleansing to the feet of those who were with Him. It is all a working out of the same double motive which drew Him downwards to our earth. The reason why He stooped, with His hands to wash the disciples' feet, is the same as the reason why He had hands to wash with—viz., that knowing Himself to be high over all, and loving all, He chose to become one with us, that we might become like unto Him. So the details of the act are a parable of His incarnation and death.

III.—And then, still further, note the purpose of the deed.

Now, although I have said that we never rightly understand our Lord's actions if we are always looking for dogmatic or doctrinal purposes, and thinking of them rather as being lectures, and sometimes rebukes in act, than as being the outgush of His emotions and of His Human-Divine nature, yet we have also to take into account their moral and spiritual lessons. His acts are words, and His words are acts. And, although

the main and primary purpose of this incident, in so far as it had any other purpose than to relieve Christ's own love by manifesting itself, and to comfort the disciples' hearts by the tender manifestation, was to teach them their duty, as we shall presently see, yet the special aspect of cleansing which comes out so emphatically and prominently in the episode of Peter's refusal, is to be carried all along through the interpretation of the incident. This was the reason why Jesus Christ came from Heaven, and assumed flesh; and this was the reason why Jesus Christ, assuming flesh, bowed Himself to this menial office—to make men clean.

I venture to say that we never understand Jesus Christ and His work until we recognize as its prominent purpose our cleansing from sin. An inadequate conception of what we need, shallow, superficial views of the gravity and universality and obstinacy of the fact of sin, are an impenetrable veil between men and all real understanding of Jesus Christ. There is no adequate object for such an astounding fact as the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God, except the purpose of redeeming the world. If you do not believe that you—you individually, and all of us your brethren—need to be cleansed, you will find it hard to believe in the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ. If you have been down into the depths of your own heart, and found out what tremendous, diabolic power your own evil nature and sin have upon you, then you will not be content with anything less than the incarnate God who stoops from Heaven to bear the burden of your sin, and to take it all away. If you want to understand

why He laid aside His garments, and took the servile form of our manhood, the appeal of man's sin to His love and the answer of His Divine condescension are the only explanation.

Again, let me remind you that there is no cleansing without Christ. Can you do it for yourselves, do you think? There is an old proverb, "One hand washes the other." That is true about stains on the flesh. It is not true about stains on our spirits. Nobody can do it for us but Jesus Christ alone. He kneels before us, having the right and the power to wash us because He has died for us. Kings of England used to "touch for the king's evil," and lay their pure fingers upon feculent masses of corruption. Our King's touch is sovereign for the corruption and incipient putrefaction of our sin; and there is no power in Heaven or earth that will make a man clean except the power of Jesus Christ. It is either Jesus Christ or filthiness.

If I might pass from my text for one moment, I would remind you of the episode which immediately follows, and suggest that if Jesus Christ is not cleansing us He is nothing to us. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in Me." I know, of course, that it is possible to have partial, rudimentary, and sometimes reverent conceptions of that Lord without recognizing in Him the great "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." But I am sure of this, that there is no real, living possession of Jesus Christ such as men's souls need, and such as will outlast the disintegrating influences of death, unless it be a possession of Him which appropriates for its own, primarily, His cleansing power. First of all, He must

cleanse, and then all other aspects of His glory and gifts of His grace will pour into our hearts.

No understanding of Christ, then, without the recognition that cleansing is the purpose and the vindication of His incarnation and sacrifice. No cleansing without Christ; no Christ worth calling by the name without cleansing.

IV.—And so, lastly, note the pattern in this act.

You will remember that it is followed by solemn words — after He had taken His garments and resumed His place at the table—in which there blended, in the most wonderful fashion, the consciousness of authority both as Teacher of truth and as Guide of life, and the sweetest and most loving lowliness. In them Jesus prescribed the wonderful act of His condescending love and cleansing power as the law of the Christian life. There are too many of us who profess to be quite willing to trust to Jesus Christ as the cleanser of our souls who are not nearly so willing to accept His example as the pattern for our lives; and I would have you note, as an extremely remarkable point, that all the New Testament references to our Lord as being our Example are given in immediate connection with His passion. The very part of His life which we generally regard as being most absolutely unique and inimitable is the fact in His life which Apostles and Evangelists select as the one to set before us for our example.

Do you say, can any man copy the sufferings of Jesus Christ? In regard of their virtue and efficacy, No. In regard of their motive, in one aspect, No; in another aspect, Yes. In regard of the spirit that impelled Him we may copy. The smallest trickle of

water down a city gutter will carve out of the mud at its side little banks and cliffs, and exhibit all the phenomena of erosion which the Mississippi displays on the largest scale, over half a continent. The tiniest wave in a basin will fall into the same curves as the billows of mid-ocean. You and I, in our little lives, may even aspire to "do *as* I have done to you."

The true use of superiority is service. *Noblesse oblige!* Rank, wealth, capacity, talents, all things are given to us that we may use them to the last particle for our fellows. Only when the world and society have awakened to that great truth which the towel-girded, kneeling Christ has taught us will society be organized on the principles that God meant.

But, further, the highest form of service is to cleanse. Cleansing is always dirty work for the cleaners, as every housemaid knows. You cannot make people clean by scolding them, by lecturing them, by patronizing them. You have to go down into the dirt if you mean to haul them out of it; and leave your smelling bottles behind and think nothing repulsive if your stooping to it may save a brother.

The only way by which we can imitate that example is by, first of all, participating in it for ourselves. We must have the Cross as our trust before it can become our pattern and our law. We must, first, say, "Lord! not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." And then, in the measure in which we ourselves have received that cleansing benediction, we shall be impelled, and able to lay our gentle hands on filth and leprosy; and to say to all the impure, "Jesus Christ, who hath cleansed *me*, makes *thee* clean."

XIX.

The Troubled Christ.

"He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled."—John xi. 33.

OUR Lord is on the way to the tomb of Lazarus, and as He looks at the two poor weeping sisters, and the company of more or less sincere mourners weeping with them, a storm of unwonted emotion sweeps across the surface of His generally untroubled spirit. The fact of the emotion is noteworthy, and the nature of it is not less so. A word of explanation as to the terms of our text may put us in the way for gathering the lessons from this unique exhibition of Christ as "troubled."

Now, you will find in the margin of the Revised Version an alternative rendering of the first clause of my text, which distinctly is to be preferred. Instead of "groaned," that version reads, "was moved with indignation," and that is undeniably, I think, the true meaning of the word. Then the second clause of my text would be more accurately, and yet not pedantically, rendered, "troubled Himself." And though, of course, that phrase may be a mere synonym for the more ordinary passive "was troubled," still I think that it is extremely improbable that the evangelist

should have employed such a remarkable expression if he had meant nothing more than what is indicated by the more ordinary one. Then, further, we have to observe that we find the further development of this agitation in the tears of Christ.

So, putting all these things together, and making the alterations which I have suggested in the terms of the text, we see here vehement emotion fostered and encouraged by Jesus Christ, and that of such a sort as that in it there is grief mingled with indignation. Now I think that that stands alone in the New Testament as a picture of one phase of Christ's experience, and is profoundly pathetic, and as profoundly significant. And I seek to draw two or three plain lessons from it.

I.—First, then, let me ask you to note here the self-troubled Christ.

"My peace give I unto you," He said once, at a time when few men could have spoken of peace, and the words are significant of the ordinary characteristic of His life, round which there lay an untroubled quiet, like a very atmosphere. But tranquillity is not impassiveness, and an unemotional manhood would be a very imperfect manhood. Unspeakably precious to us, therefore, as giving us an assurance of the inmost kindred of Jesus Christ with ourselves in what we sometimes, with a foolish pride, are accustomed to think weakness and to suppress, are all these intimations that He, too, lived a life of feeling, and was affected by present circumstances. That evidence of His true Manhood is even more thorough and more touching than that which is drawn from the consideration that He shared in our corporeal necessities.

It is much to know that He hungered, that He thirsted, that He was weary, that He slept the sleep of active and exhausting toil; but it is more to know that He wondered, and desired with desire, and was grieved and wept, and even was angry; for thus we learn that "in all points" He experienced our fate, and that "we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities."

But, then let us remember that all these exhibitions of a true and thorough manhood derive their preciousness, their power, and their pathos, from the underlying conviction that this manhood is the temple in which there dwelt Divinity. What would it matter to me that a man, however good, however important in the development of the world's history, was moved with the common emotions of humanity? But when I can say to myself that the hungry, thirsty, weary, sleeping Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and when I can further think that He who so entered into the limits of humanity as that He could be surprised, and so shared our tremulous nature as that He could be grieved, and glad, and indignant, was the Son of God, I bow, and, with adoring reverence say, "Lo! This is our God"—this, and not an impassive monster, far away from our experiences, and, therefore, from our love, but dwelling with us and one of us, that we may be drawn near to Him.

It is, important, therefore, to notice that wherever, as in this incident, we have in Scripture some most conspicuous instance of our Lord's participation in the infirmities and limitations of manhood, there, side by side with it, as certainly as there must be a mountain summit where there is a valley, we have

some instance of our Lord's true and proper possession of the power of Divinity. For the weeping Christ, the moved and troubled Man, is He who cast His autocratic voice into the thick darkness of the grave, and made it penetrate through the folds of the napkin that wrapped the face of the dead, and through the veils of that other state, and said, "Lazarus! Come forth." Inextricably interwoven are the weakness of the man and the omnipotence of the God. And I, for my part, cannot believe that any anonymous scribe could have conceived and stamped on the world's heart the image of the Being that united these two apparently incompatible opposites, unless he had been simply a faithful reporter of what he had beheld. So, then, we have here Jesus Christ shown as one of ourselves by the very agitation that swept across His spirit.

But note, further, how we have here Jesus Christ stimulating and encouraging this trouble of His Spirit. "He troubled Himself." Now there is a fostering of emotion, which is unreal, insincere, hypocritical, and harmful. There is nothing more mawkish and disgusting than pumped-up feeling, manufactured to order, because men think they ought to feel. It is separated by a very narrow line from lying.

But, on the other hand, there is a stimulating and encouraging of emotions, if the emotions be themselves right and legitimate, which is wholly right and a plain part of self-government and culture. We usually talk about self-control with the idea that it means damping down feeling. So it does; but there are feelings which men need to stimulate by setting before themselves resolvedly the objects that should evoke them,

and by many another way on which I do not need to dwell now. And one lesson that I draw from this strange picture of my text is that the possession of emotions is not weakness, but rather strength; but that weakness is to let them be our masters. Control them, keep them well in hand and under check. Let principle guide feeling, and conscience move principle. Stimulate the sentiments which a true man would have in the presence of grief, and do not be afraid of stirring up yourselves to feelings, the possession of which bless you, and should impel you to bless the world. We have a Master who, though He dwelt in eternal calm even in His manhood, would have been untrue to His manhood and His Godhead alike if, in the presence of sorrow, loss, and death, He had not "troubled Himself."

There are plenty of us priding ourselves on our equable temperament, on our mastery of our emotions, who would be twenty times better men if there were more frequently flashed through them the electric shock of these generous emotions; and if they lived more than they do under their influence.

But then, again, let me remind you that in this picture of a troubled Christ we may see not only the sanction, but also the limits, of legitimate feeling, especially of sorrow. A spurious philosophy tells us that emotional lives are low; a spurious pride is ashamed of the exhibition of feeling; a spurious Christianity preaches to us that sorrow is sin. And, in answer to all that, we point to Jesus Christ at the grave of Lazarus, shaken by the vehemence of His emotions, and we say, "That is our pattern."

But He teaches us also the limits of sorrow. Look

at these two sisters if you want to see excessive emotion. One of them was restless in her grief, unfit to settle down to anything, rushing out to meet the Master with what was almost like a rebuke upon her lips; impatient when He flashed some faint beam of hope into her grief, putting away petulantly the thought of "the resurrection on the last day" as much too far off and shadowy to be of any use in present sorrow. And the other of them was sitting with folded hands on her lap, doing nothing but eating her heart out with her sorrows. Let us learn that grief is excessive and sinful when it selfishly absorbs us, makes us oblivious of duty, sets us to aimless regretting that something had not happened which did not happen, and which if it had happened would have made everything else different, and above all when it makes us put away from us, with impatient hand, as too far off, the solace and hopes that lie in the great Beyond. And from these two poor, weeping women, to be pardoned and yet to be blamed for the exuberant extravagance of their grief, let us turn to Him who ruled His emotions, and bid back His tears, in order to lift up His voice in confident acknowledgment that the Father heard Him, and then to fling it into the grave, the word of life-giving power. Sorrow that brings us nearer to God in close communion with Him, sorrow that sends us upon our path with the assurance that we are doing the Father's will, sorrow that makes us gentle with all other sad hearts; that is the sorrow which is worthy of the Christ.

II.—And so note, secondly, how we have here the indignant Christ.

"He was moved with indignation in His spirit."

Why? At what? Not at these poor weeping sisters; not at anybody that stood there. That is plain enough. Then, at what? or why? I suppose because He saw in that one single instance a reproduction in little, and, as it were, an isolated specimen, of all the miseries and evils that were bringing sorrows to so many hearts all over the world, and saw the sorrow in its cause as a fruit of sin.

Perhaps there may be some reference in the indignation to a dark personal source of the sin which begat the sorrow. But whether that be so or no, at all events here we have Jesus Christ looking upon man's miseries, and regarding them with the indignation mingled with grief which is due to the consideration that the miseries are the fruits of evil.

Therefore I say we may learn from this how it becomes us to look upon suffering and sorrow. We must take, in connection with these words, other words in this same Gospel, which at first sight seem to point in another direction. When the disciples with a foolish curiosity, put the question to our Lord about one poor blind man, "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" they got the answer, "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." There our Lord denies that individual transgression is the cause of individual suffering. But here, on the other hand, the indignation implies that the general sorrow is the result of human sin, and that is a hopeful thought. Sorrow, tears, death, and all the other ills that flesh is heir to are an alien and abnormal excrescence upon crea-

tion as God meant it; and He has nothing to do with them but to hate them, and to fight against them, and to cast them out, and to deliver us from them. True, He uses them as His ministers and messengers. True, the chastisement that falls upon His children is the token of His love. But all this is perfectly consistent with the other view, that we are to regard the so-called evil, which is suffering, as being an ugly, unnatural intruder into the creation of God; and that, as did Christ, so we should seek to stimulate in ourselves that passionate sentiment of abhorrence of the cause which has brought about such evils.

Let any man, with Christ's eyes in his head, and Christ's spirit in his spirit, walk the streets of Manchester for one hour, and he will see plenty to arouse his wholesome indignation—an indignation which falls, not so much on the victims as on the evil, which is sin, of which they are the victims. But, alas, custom and selfish engrossment with our own affairs make many of us quite insensible of the miseries attendant upon the present social order, and we are too apt to take these things as inseparable adjuncts of our civilization, like bilge water in a ship or the rattle and dust of a train, very disagreeable, but not to be got rid of.

We may learn, too, what was one very large element in the sorrow of Jesus Christ. He saw causes as we do not. He saw the whole in the single instance; He was keenly sensitive to the contrast between what might have been and what was, as we are not. And all that keenness of insight and depth of penetration were associated in Him with a tenderness and sensitiveness of sympathy, due to His own sinlessness,

miseries from which he seeks to deliver. A feeble illustration of it is given to us in the old story of the man who made himself a slave in order to deliver those who were in bondage. And the highest manifestation of it is given in this, that He Himself bare the sickness that He was to bear away; that He endured the griefs which He was to alleviate; that He bowed His head to the death which He was to abolish; that He entered into the grave which He was to burst; and so, having passed through all man's miseries, He becomes the Deliverer from all.

Our service for the world can be done on no other terms than His service for us was done. It takes a great deal out of a man truly to help another. We need that our feelings should be stimulated; but all stimulation of feeling which does not end in active work is bad and harmful.

And therefore, dear brethren, though there be much in this strange picture of my text inimitable and unique, the spirit of it must be reproduced in our lives if we are to be the followers of Jesus Christ, and we, too, must know what it is to feel the full rush of the flood that we would stem, and to bear in ourselves the sorrows from which we seek to free others.

Is it not strange that Jesus Christ should have been thus shaken by passionate emotion over sorrows which He knew would all pass like a summer cloud in five minutes? People wonder that He thus was indignant, and troubled Himself and wept, when He was just on the point of bringing Lazarus back. Ah! if Jesus Christ did not feel with us our "light affliction which is but for a moment," what would there be left

for Him to feel with us? Blessed be God! however sure He may be that in an instant or two He will bring relief and consolation, like sudden sunshine on a winter's day, He none the less bears the burden of our trivial sorrows and takes the load of our fleeting distresses, and weeps with us the tears which next moment He wipes from off all faces. Take Him for your Friend and Comforter; take Him for your Pattern and Example.

XX.

Secret Faults.

WHO can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults."—PSALM xix. 12.

THE contemplation of the "perfect law enlightening the eyes," sends the Psalmist to his knees. He is appalled by his own shortcomings, and feels that beside all those of which he is aware, there is a region, as yet unilluminated by that law, where evil things nestle and breed.

The Jewish ritual drew a broad distinction between inadvertent—whether involuntary or ignorant—and deliberate sins; providing atonement for the former, not for the latter. The word in my text rendered "errors," is closely connected with that which in the Levitical system designates the former class of transgressions; and the connection between the two clauses of the text, as well as that with the subsequent verse, distinctly shows that the "secret faults" of the one clause are substantially synonymous with the "errors" of the other.

They are, then, not sins hidden from men, whether because they have been done quietly in a corner, and remain undetected, or because they have only been in thought, never passing into act. Both of these pages

are dark in every man's memory. Who is there that could reveal himself to men? who is there that could bear the sight of a naked soul? But the Psalmist is thinking of a still more solemn fact that, beyond the range of conscience and consciousness, there are evils in us all. It may do us good to ponder his discovery that he had undiscovered sins, and to take for ours his prayer, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

I.—So I ask you to look with me, briefly, first, at the solemn fact here, that there are in every man sins of which the doer is unaware.

It is with our characters as with our faces. Few of us are familiar with our own appearance, and most of us, if we have looked at our portraits, have felt a little shock of surprise, and been ready to say to ourselves, "Well! I did not know that I looked like that!" And the bulk even of good men are almost as much strangers to their inward physiognomy as to their outward. They see themselves in their looking-glasses every morning, although they "go away and forget what manner of men" they were. But they do not see their true selves in the same fashion in any other mirror.

It is the very characteristic of all evil that it has a strange power of deceiving a man as to its real character; like the cuttle-fish, that squirts out a cloud of ink and so escapes in the darkness and the dirt. The more a man goes wrong the less he knows it. Conscience is loudest when it is least needed, and most silent when most required.

Then, besides that, there is a great part of everybody's life which is mechanical, instinctive—all but involuntary. Habits and emotions and passing impulses very seldom come into men's consciousness,

and an enormously large proportion of everybody's life is done with the minimum of attention, and is as little remembered as it is observed.

Then, besides that, conscience wants educating. You see that on a large scale, for instance, in the history of the slow progress which Christian principle has made in leavening the world's thinkings. It took eighteen centuries to teach the Church that slavery was unchristian. The church has not yet learned that war is unchristian; and it is only beginning to surmise that possibly Christian principle may have something to say in social questions, and in the determination, for example, of the relations of capital and labour, and of wealth and poverty. The very same slowness of apprehension and gradual growth in the education of conscience, and in the perception of the application of Christian principles to duty, applies to the individual as to the Church.

Then, besides that, we are all biased in our own favour, and what, when another man says it, is "flat blasphemy," we think, when we say it, is only "a choleric word." We have fine names for our own vices, and ugly ones for the very same vices in other people. David will flare up into generous and sincere indignation about the man that stole the poor man's ewe lamb. But he has not the ghost of a notion that he has been doing the very same thing himself. And so we bribe our consciences as well as neglect them, and they need to be educated.

Thus, down in the depths of every life there lies a great dim region of habits and impulses and fleeting emotions, into which it is the rarest thing for a man to go with a candle in his hand to see what it is like.

But I can imagine a man saying, "Well, if I do not know that I am doing wrong, how can it be a sin?" In answer to that, I would say that, thank God! ignorance diminishes criminality, but ignorance does not alter the nature of the deed. Take a simple illustration. Here is a man who, all unconsciously to himself, is allowing worldly prosperity to sap his Christian character. He does not know that the great current of his life has been turned aside, as it were, by that sluice, and is taken to drive the wheels of his mill, and that there is only a miserable little trickle coming down the river bed. Is he any less guilty because he does not know? Is he not the more so, because he might and would have known if he had thought and felt right? Or, here is another man who has the habit of letting his temper get the better of him. He calls it "stern adherence to principle," or "righteous indignation"; and he thinks himself very badly used when other people "drive him" so often into a temper. Other people know, and *he* might know, if he would be honest with himself, that for all his fine names it is nothing else than passion. Is he any the less guilty because of his ignorance? It is plain enough that, whilst ignorance, if it is absolute and inevitable, does diminish criminality to the vanishing point, the ignorance of our own faults which most of us display is neither absolute nor inevitable; and, therefore, though it may, thank God! diminish, it does not destroy our guilt. "She wipeth her mouth and saith, I have done no harm." *Was* she, therefore, chaste and pure? There are many vermin lurking beneath the stones in all our hearts, and they are none the less poisonous because they live and multiply

in the dark. "I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified. But he that judgeth me is the Lord."

II.—Now, secondly, let me ask you to look at the special perilousness of these hidden faults.

As with blight upon a rose-tree, the little green creatures lurk on the underside of the leaves, and in all the folds of the buds, and, because unseen, they increase with alarming rapidity. The very fact that we have faults in our characters, which everybody sees but ourselves, makes it certain that they will grow unchecked, and so will prove terribly perilous. The small things of life are the great things of life. For a man's character is made up of them and of their results striking inwards upon himself. A wine-glass-ful of water with one drop of mud in it may not be much obscured, but if you come to multiply it into a lakeful, you will have muddy waves that reflect no heavens, and show no gleaming stars.

These secret faults are like a fungus that has grown in a wine-cask; whose presence nobody suspected. It sucks up all the generous liquor to feed its own filthiness, and when the staves are broken there is no wine left, nothing but the fowl growth. Many a Christian man and woman has the whole Christian life arrested, and all but annihilated, by the unsuspected influence of a secret sin. I do not believe it would be exaggeration to say that for one man who has made shipwreck of his faith and lost his peace by reason of some gross transgression, there are twenty who have fallen into the same condition by reason of the multitude of small ones. "He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little," and whilst

the deeds which the ten commandments rebuke are damning to a Christian character, still more perilous, because unseen, and permitted to grow without check or restraint, are these unconscious sins. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."

III.—Notice the discipline, or practical issues, to which such considerations should lead.

To begin with, they ought to take down our self-complacency, if we have any, and to make us feel that, after all, our characters are very poor things. If men praise us let us try to remember what it will be good for us to remember, too, when we are tempted to praise ourselves—the underworld of darkness which each of us carries about within us.

Further, let me press upon you two practical points. This whole set of contemplations should make us practise a very rigid and close self-inspection. There will always be much that will escape our observation. We shall gradually grow to know more and more of it. But there can be no excuse for that which I fear is a terribly common characteristic of the professing Christianity of this day—the all but entire absence of close inspection of one's own character and conduct. I know very well that it is not a wholesome thing for a man to be always poking in his own feelings and emotions. I know also that in a former generation there was far too much introspection instead of looking to Jesus Christ and forgetting self. I do not believe that self-examination, directed to the discovery of reasons for trusting the sincerity of my own faith, is a good thing. But I do believe that without the practice of careful weighing of ourselves, there will

be very little growth in anything that is noble and good.

The old Greeks used to preach, "Know thyself." It was a high behest, and very often a very vainglorious one. A man's best means of knowing what he is is to take stock of what he does. If you will put your conduct through the sieve, you will come to a pretty good understanding of your character. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls," into which all enemies can leap unhindered, and out from which all things that will may pass. Do you set guards at the gates and watch yourselves with all carefulness.

Then, again, I would say we must try to diminish as much as possible the mere instinctive and habitual and mechanical part of our lives, and to bring, as far as we can, every action under the conscious dominion of principle. The less we live by impulse, and the more we live by intelligent reflection, the better it will be for us. The more we can get habit on the side of goodness the better; but the more we break up our habits, and make each individual action the result of a special volition of the spirit guided by reason and conscience, the better for us all.

Then, again, I would say, set yourselves to educate your consciences. They need that. One of the surest ways of making conscience more sensitive is always to consult it and always to obey it. If you neglect it, and let it prophesy to the wind, it will stop speaking before long. Herod could not get a word out of Christ when he "asked Him many questions" because for years he had cared not to hear His voice. And conscience, like the Lord of conscience, will hold

its peace when men have neglected its speech. You can pull the clapper out of the bell upon the rock; and then, though the waves may dash, there will not be a sound, and the vessel will drive straight on to the black teeth that are waiting for it. Educate your conscience by obeying, and by getting into the habit of bringing everything to its bar.

And, still further, compare yourselves constantly with your model. Do as the art students do in a gallery, take your poor daub right into the presence of the masterpiece, and go over it line by line and tint by tint. Get near Jesus Christ that you may learn your duty from Him, and you will find out many of the secret sins.

And, lastly, let us ask God to cleanse us.

My text, as translated in the Revised Version, says, "*Clear* Thou me from secret faults." And there is present in that word, if not exclusively, at least prodominantly, the idea of a judicial acquittal, so that the thought of the first clause of this verse seems rather to be that of pronouncing guiltless, or forgiving, than that of delivering from the power of. But both, no doubt, are included in the idea, as both, in fact, come from the same source and in response to the same cry.

And so we may be sure that, though our eye does not go down there into the dark depths, God's eye goes, and that where He looks He looks to pardon, if we come to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

He will deliver us from the power of these secret sins, giving to us that Divine Spirit, which is "the candle of the Lord," to search us, and to convince of our sins, and to drag our evil into the light: and

giving us the help without which we can never overcome. The only way for us to be delivered from the dominion of our unconscious faults is to increase the depth and closeness and constancy of our communion with Jesus Christ; and then they will drop away from us. Mosquitoes and malaria, the one unseen in their minuteness, and the other "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," haunt the swamps. Go up on the hill top, and neither of them are found. So if we live more and more on the high levels, in communion with our Master, there will be fewer and fewer of these unconscious sins buzzing and stinging and poisoning our lives, and more and more will His grace conquer and cleanse.

They will all be manifested some day. The time comes when He shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness and the counsels of men's hearts. There will be surprises on both hands of the Judge. Some on the right, astonished, will say, "Lord, when saw we Thee?" and some on the left, smitten with confusion and surprise, will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name?"

Let us go to Him with the prayer, "Search me, O God, and try me; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."

XXI.

Open Sins.

"KEEP back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."—PSALM xix. 13.

ANOTHER psalmist promises to the man who dwells "in the secret place of the Most High" that "he shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh at noonday," but shall "tread upon the lion and adder." These promises divide the dangers that beset us into the same two classes as our psalmist does; the one, secret; the other, palpable and open. The former, which, as I explained in the last sermon, are sins hidden, not from others, but from the doer, may fairly be likened to the pestilence that stalks slaying in the dark, or to the stealthy, gliding serpent, which strikes and poisons before the naked foot is aware. The other resembles the "destruction that wasteth at noonday," or the lion with its roar and its spring, as, disclosed from its covert, it leaps upon the prey.

Our present text deals with the latter of these

two classes. "Presumptuous sins" does not, perhaps convey to an ordinary reader the whole significance of the phrase, for it may be taken to define a single class of sins—namely, those of pride or insolence. What is really meant is just the opposite of "secret sins"—all sorts of evil which, whatever may be their motives and other qualities, have this in common, that the doer, when he does them, knows them to be wrong.

The Psalmist gets this further glimpse into the terrible possibilities which attach even to a servant of God, and we have in our text these three things—a danger discerned; a help sought; and a daring hope cherished.

I.—Note, then, the first of these, the dreaded and discerned danger—"presumptuous sins" which may "have dominion over" us, and lead us at last to a "great transgression."

Now the word which is translated "presumptuous" literally means *that which boils or bubbles;* and it sets very picturesquely before us the movement of hot desires—the agitation of excited impulses or inclinations which hurry men into sin in spite of their consciences. It is also to be noticed that the prayer of my text, with singular pathos and lowly self-consciousness, is the prayer of "Thy servant," who knows himself to be a servant, and who therefore knows that these glaring transgressions, done in the teeth of conscience and consciousness, are all inconsistent with his standing and his profession, but yet are perfectly possible for him.

An old mediæval mystic once said, "There is nothing weaker than a devil stripped naked." Would it were true! For there is one thing that is

weaker than a discovered devil, and that is my own heart. For we all know that sometimes, with our eyes open, and the most unmistakable consciousness that what we are doing was wrong, we have set our teeth and done it, Christian men though we may profess to be, and may really be. All such conduct is inconsistent with Christianity; but we are not to say, therefore, that it is incompatible with Christianity. Thank God! that is a very different matter. But as long as you and I have two things—viz., strong and hot desires, and weak and flabby wills—so long shall we, in this world full of combustibles, not be beyond the possibility of a dreadful conflagration being set up by some devil-blown sparks. There are plenty of dry sticks lying about to put under the cauldron of our hearts, to make it boil and bubble over. And we have, alas! but weak wills, which do not always keep the reins in their hands as they ought to do, nor coerce these lower parts of our nature into their proper surbordination. Fire is a good servant but a bad master; and we are all of us too apt to let it become master, and then the whole "course of nature" is "set on fire of hell." The servant of God may yet, with open eyes and obstinate regard of his better self, and of all its remonstrances, go straight into "presumptuous sin."

Another step is here taken by the Psalmist. He looks shrinkingly and shudderingly into a possible depth, and he sees, going down into the abyss, a ladder with three rungs on it. The topmost one is wilful, self-conscious transgression. But that is not the lowest stage; there is another step. Presumptuous sin tends to become despotic sin. "Let them not

have dominion over me." A man may do a very bad thing once, and get so awfully frightened, and so keenly conscious of its disastrous issues, that he will never go near it again. The prodigal would not be in a hurry, you may depend upon it, to try the swine trough and the far country and the rags and the fever and the famine any more. David got a lesson that he never forgot in that matter of Bathsheba. The bitter fruit of his sin kept growing up all his life, and he had to eat it, and that kept him right. They tell us that broken bones are stronger at the point of fracture than they were before. And it is possible for a man's sin—if I might use a paradox which you will not misunderstand—to become the instrument of his salvation.

But there is another possibility quite as probable, and very often recurring, and that is that the disease, like some other morbid states of the human frame, shall leave a tendency to recurrence. A pin-point hole in a dyke will widen into a gap as big as a church door in ten minutes, by the pressure of the flood behind it. And so every act which we do in contradiction of our standing as professing Christians, and in the face of the protests, all unavailing, of that conscience which is only a voice, and has no power to enforce its behests, will tend to recurrence once and again. The single acts become habits with awful rapidity. Just as the separate gas-jets from a multitude of minute apertures coalesce into a continuous ring of light, so deeds become habits and get dominion over us. "He sold himself to do evil." He made himself a bond-slave of iniquity. It is an awful and a miserable thing to think that professing

Christians do often come into that position of being, by their inflamed passions and enfeebled wills, servants of the evil that they do. Alas! how many of us, if we were honest with ourselves, would have to say, "I am carnal, sold unto sin."

That is not the lowest rung of the slippery ladder. Despotic sin ends in utter departure.

The word translated here, quite correctly, "transgression," and intensified by that strong adjective attached, "a great transgression," literally means *rebellion, revolt,* or some such idea; and expresses, as the ultimate issue of conscious transgression prolonged and perpetuated into habit, an entire casting off of allegiance to God. "No man can serve two masters." "His servants ye are whom ye obey," whomsoever you may call your master. The Psalmist feels that the end of indulged evil is going over altogether to the other camp. I suppose all of us have known instances of that sort. Men in my position, with a long life of ministry behind them, can naturally remember many such instances. And this is the outline history of the suicide of a Christian. First, secret sin, unsuspected because the conscience is torpid; then open sin, known to be such, but done nevertheless; then dominant sin, with an enfeebled will and power of resistance; then the abandonment of all pretence or profession of religion. The ladder goes down into the pit, but not to the bottom of the pit. And the man that is going down it has a descending impulse after he has reached the bottom step, and he falls—Where? The first step down is tampering with conscience. It is neither safe nor wise to do anything, howsoever small, against that voice. All the rest will come

afterward, unless God restrains, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," and then the bitter harvest of the poisonous grain.

II.—So, secondly, note the help sought.

The Psalmist is like a man standing on the edge of some precipice, and peeping over the brink to the profound beneath, and feeling his head beginning to swim. He clutches at the strong, steady hand of his guide, knowing that, unless he is restrained, over he will go. "Keep Thou back Thy servant from presumptuous sins."

So, then, the first lesson we have to take is, to cherish a lowly consciousness of our own tendency to light-headedness and giddiness. "Blessed is the man that feareth always." That fear has nothing cowardly about it. It will not abate in the least the buoyancy and bravery of our work. It will not tend to make us shirk duty because there is temptation in it, but it will make us go into all circumstances, realizing that without that Divine help we cannot stand, and that with it we cannot fall. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." The same Peter that said, "Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I," was wiser and braver when he said, in later days, being taught by former presumption, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Let me remind you, too, that the temper which we ought to cherish is that of a confident belief in the reality of a Divine support. The prayer of my text has no meaning at all unless the actual supernatural communication of God's own Holy Spirit breathed into men's hearts be a simple truth. "Hold Thou me up," "Keep Thou me back," means, if it means

anything, Give me in my heart a mightier strength than mine own, which shall curb all this evil nature of mine, and bring it into conformity with Thy holy will.

How is that restraining influence to be exercised? There are many ways by which God, in His providence, can fulfil the prayer. But the way above all others is by the actual operation upon heart and will and desires of a Divine Spirit, which uses for its weapon the Word of God, revealed by Jesus Christ, and in the Scriptures. "The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God," and God's answer to the prayer of my text is the gift to every man who seeks it of that indwelling power to sustain and to restrain.

That will keep our passions down. The bubbling water is lowered in its temperature, and ceases to bubble, when cold is added to it. When God's Spirit comes into a man's heart that will deaden his desires after earth and forbidden ways. It will bring blessed higher objects for all our affections. He who has been fed on "the hidden manna" will not be likely to hanker after the leeks and onions, however strong their smell and pungent their taste, that grow in the Nile mud in Egypt. He who has tasted the higher sweetnesses of God will have his heart's desires after lower delights strangely deadened and cooled. Get near God, and open your hearts for the entrance of that Divine Spirit, and then it will not seem foolish to empty your hands of the trash that they carry, in order to grasp the precious things that He gives. A bit of scrap iron magnetized turns to the pole. My heart, touched by the Spirit of God dwelling in me, will turn to Him, and I shall find little sweetness in

[illegible] if you failed it was because your [illegible] Supper had relaxed their grasp.

[illegible]—Lastly, observe the daring hope here [illegible].

"Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." That is the upshot of the Divine answer to both the petitions which have been occupying us in these two successive sermons. It is connected with the former of them by the recurrence of the same word, which in the first petition was rendered "cleanse"—or more accurately, "clear"—and in this final clause is to be rendered accurately "I shall be clear from the great transgression." And it obviously connects in sense with both those petitions, because, in order to be upright and clear, there must, first of all, be Divine cleansing and then Divine restraint.

So, then, nothing short of absolute deliverance from the power of sin in all its forms should satisfy the servant of God. Nothing short of it satisfies the Master for the servant. Nothing short of it corresponds to the power which Christ puts in operation in every heart that believes in Him. And nothing less should be our aim in our daily conflict with evil and growth in grace. Ah! I fear me that for an immense number of professing Christians in this generation the hope of, and, still more, the aim towards, anything approximating to entire deliverance from sin has faded from their consciousness and their lives. Aim at the stars, brother and, if you do not hit them, your arrow will go higher than if it were shot among the lower levels.

Note that an indefinite approximation to this condition is possible. I am not going to discuss at this hour of my discourse controversial questions

which may be involved here. It will be time enough to discuss with you whether you can be absolutely free from sin in this world when you are a great deal freer from it than you are at present. At all events, you can get far nearer to the ideal, and the ideal must always be perfect. And I lay it on your hearts, dear friends, that you have in your possession, if you are Christian people, possibilities in the way of conformity to the Master's will, and entire emancipation from all corruption, that you have not yet dreamed of, not to say applied to your lives. "I pray God that He would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming."

That daring hope will be fulfilled one day; for nothing short of it will exhaust the possibilities of Christ's work or satisfy the desires of Christ's heart.

The Gospel knows nothing of irreclaimable outcasts. To it there is but one unpardonable sin, and that is the sin of refusing the cleansing of Christ's blood and the sanctifying of Christ's Spirit. Whoever you are, whatever you are, go to God with this prayer of our text, and realize that it is answered in Jesus Christ, and you will not ask in vain. If you will put yourselves into His hands, and let Him cleanse and restrain, He will give you new powers to detect the serpents in the flowers, and new resolution to shake off the vipers into the fire. For there is nothing that God wants half so much as that we, His wandering children, should come back to Him, and He will cleanse us from the filth of the swine trough and the rags of our exile, and clothe us in fine linen, clean and white. We may each be sinless and guiltless. We

can be so in one way only. If we look to Jesus Christ, and live near Him, He "will be made of God unto us wisdom," by which we shall detect our secret sins, "righteousness," whereby we shall be cleansed from guilt, "sanctification," which shall restrain us from open transgression, "and redemption," by which we shall be wholly delivered from evil and presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

XXII.

Our Strong City.

"In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.

"Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."—Isa. xxvi. 1, 2.

THAT day is "that day"? The answer carries us back a couple of chapters, to the great picture drawn by the prophet of a world-wide judgment, which is followed by a burst of song from the ransomed people of Jehovah, like Miriam's chant by the shores of the Red Sea. The "city of confusion," the centre of the power hostile to God and man, falls; and its fall is welcomed by a chorus of praises. The words of my text are the beginning of one of these songs. Whether or not there were any historical event which floated before the prophet's mind is wholly uncertain. If there were a smaller judgment upon some city of the enemy, it passes in his view into a world-wide judgment; and my text is purely ideal, imaginative, and apocalyptic. Its nearest ally is the similar vision of the Book of the Revelation, where, when Babylon sank with a splash like a millstone in the stream, the ransomed people raised their praises.

So, then, whatever may have been the immediate horizon of the prophet, and though there may have stood in it some historical event, the city which he sees falling is other than any material Babylon, and the strong city in which he rejoices is other than the material Jerusalem, though it may have suggested the metaphor of my text. The song fits our lips quite as closely as it did the lips from which it first sprang, thrilling with triumph. "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."

There are three things, then, here; the city, its defences, its citizens.

I.—The City.

Now, no doubt the prophet was thinking of the literal Jerusalem, but the city is ideal, as is shown by the bulwarks which defend, and by the qualifications which permit entrance. And so we must pass beyond the literalities of Palestine, and, as I think, must not apply the symbol to any visible institution or organisation if we are to come to the depth and greatness of the meaning of these words. No church which is organised amongst men can be the New Testament representation of this strong city. And if the explanation is to be looked for in that direction at all, it can only be the invisible aggregate of ransomed souls which is regarded as being the Zion of the prophecy.

But perhaps even that is too definite and hard. And we are rather to think of the unseen but existent order of things or polity to which men here on earth may belong, and which will one day, after shocks

and convulsions that shatter all which is merely institutional and human, be manifested still more gloriously.

The central thought that was moving in the prophet's mind is that of the indestructible vitality of the true Israel, and the order which it represented, of which Jerusalem on its rock was but to him a symbol. And thus for us the lesson is that, apart altogether from the existing and visible order of things in which we dwell, there is a polity to which we may belong, for "ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God," and that order is indestructible. Convulsions come, every Babylon falls, all human institutions change and pass. "The kingdoms old" are "cast into another mould." But persistent through them all, and, at the last, high above them all, will stand the stable polity of Heaven, "the city which hath the foundations."

There is a lesson for us, brethren, in times of fluctuation, of change of opinion, of shaking of institutions, and of new social, economical, and political questions, threatening day by day to reorganize society. "We have a strong city"; and whatever may come—and much destructive will come, and much that is venerable and antique, rooted in men's prejudices, and having survived through and oppressed the centuries, much will have to go, but—God's polity, His form of human society, of which the perfect ideal and antitype, so to speak, lies concealed in the heavens, is everlasting. Therefore, whatsoever changes, whatsoever ancient and venerable things come to be regarded as of no account, howsoever the nations, like clay in the hands of the

potter, may have to assume new forms, as certainly they will, yet the foundation of God standeth sure. And for Christian men in revolutionary epochs, whether these revolutions affect the forms in which truth is grasped, or whether they affect the moulds into which society is run, the only worthy temper is the calm, triumphant expectation that through all the dust, contradiction, and distraction, the fair city of God will be brought nearer and made more manifest to man. Isaiah, or whoever was the writer of these great words of my text, stayed his own and his people's hearts in a time of confusion and distress by the thought that it was only Babylon that could fall, and Jerusalem was the possessor of a charmed, immortal life.

This strong city, the order of human society which God had appointed, and which exists, though it be hidden in the heavens, will be manifested one day when, like the fair vision of the goddess rising from amidst the ocean's foam, and shedding peace and beauty over the charmed waves, there shall emerge from all the wild confusion and tossing billows of the sea of the peoples the fair form of the "Bride, the Lamb's wife." There shall be an apocalypse of the city, and whether the old words which catch up the spirit of my text, and speak of that Holy City as "descending from heaven" upon earth, at the close of the history of the world, are to be taken, as perhaps they are, as expressive of the truth that a renewed earth is to be the dwelling of the ransomed or no, this at least is clear, that the city shall be revealed, and when Babylon is swept away, Zion shall stand.

To this city—existent immortal, and waiting to be

revealed—you and I may belong to-day. "We *have* a strong city." You may lay hold of life either by the side of it which is transient and trivial and contemptible, or by the side of it which goes down through all the mutable and lays hold of eternity. As in some sea-weed, far out in the depths of the ocean, the tiny frond that floats upon the billow goes down and down and down, by filaments that knit it to the basal rock, so the most insignificant act of our fleeting days has a hold upon eternity, and life in all its moments may be knit to the permanent. We may unite our lives with the surface of time or with the centre of eternity. Though we dwell in tabernacles, we may still be "come to Mount Zion," and all life be awful, noble, solemn, religious, because it is all connected with the unseen city across the seas. It is for us to determine to which of these orders—the perishable, noisy and intrusive and persistent in its appeals, or the calm, silent, most real, eternal order beyond the stars — our petty lives shall attach themselves.

II.—Now, note, secondly, the defences.

"Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." This "evangelical prophet," as he has been called, is distinguished, not only by the clearness of his anticipations of Jesus Christ and His work, but by the fulness and depth which he attaches to that word "salvation." He all but anticipates the New Testament completeness and fulness of meaning, and lifts it from all merely material associations of earthly or transitory deliverance into the sphere in which we are accustomed to regard it as especially moving. By "salvation," he means and we mean, not only negative

but positive blessings. Negatively it includes the removal of every conceivable or endurable evil, "all the ills that flesh is heir to," whether they be evils of sin or evils of sorrow; and, positively, the investiture with every possible good that humanity is capable of, whether it be good of goodness or good of happiness. This is what the prophet tells us is the wall and bulwark of his ideal-real city.

Mark the eloquent omission of the name of the builder of the wall. "God" is a supplement. Salvation "will *He* appoint for walls and bulwarks." No need to say who it is that flings such a fortification around the city. There is only one hand that can trace the lines of such walls; only one hand that can pile their stones; only one that can lay them, as the walls of Jericho were laid, in the blood of His first-born Son. "Salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks." That is to say in a highly imaginative and picturesque form, that the defence of the city is God Himself; and it is substantially a parallel with other words which speak about Him as being "a wall of fire round about it, and the glory in the midst of it." Whom He means to keep safe are kept safe. Whom the operations of His mighty hand preserve are preserved. The fact of salvation is the wall and the bulwark. And the consciousness of the fact, and the sense of possessing it, is for our poor hearts one of our best defences against both the evil of sin and the evil of sorrow. For nothing so robs temptation of its power, and so lightens the pressure of calamities, and draws the poison from the fangs of sin and sorrow, as the assurance that the loving purpose of God to save grasps and keeps us. They who shelter behind that

wall, and feel that between them and sin, and them and sorrow, there rises the inexpugnable defence of an Almighty purpose and power to save, lie safe whatever betides. There is no need of other defences. Zion

> "Needs no bulwarks,
> No towers along the steep."

God Himself is the shield, and none other is required.

So, brethren, let us walk by the faith that is always confident, though it depends on an unseen hand. It is a grand thing to be able to stand, as it were, in the open, a mark for all "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," and yet to feel that around us there are walls most real, though invisible, which permit no harm to come to us. Our feeble sense-bound souls much prefer a visible wall. We like a handrail on the stair. Though it does not at all guard the descent it keeps our heads from getting dizzy. It is hard for us, as some travellers may have to do, to walk with steady foot and unthrobbing heart along a narrow ledge of rock with beetling precipice above us and black depths beneath, and we would like a little bit of a wall of some sort, for imagination if not for reality, between us and the sheer descent. But it is blessed to learn that naked we are clothed, solitary we have a Companion, and unarmed we have our defenceless heads covered with the shadow of the great wing, which, though sense sees it not, faith knows is there. A servant of God is never without a friend, and when most unsheltered

> "From marge to blue marge
> The whole sky grows his targe
> With sun's self for visible boss,"

beneath which he lies safe.

the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?" The New Testament, as emphatically as the old psalm, answers "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." "Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous." There is no way by which Christian men here on earth can pass into and keep within the city of the living God except they possess personal purity, righteousness of life, and cleanness of heart.

They used to say that Venice glass was so made that any poison poured into it shivered the vessel. Any drop of sin poured into your cup of communion with God shatters the cup and spills the wine. Whosoever thinks himself a citizen of that great city, if he falls into transgression, and soils the cleanness of his hands, and ruffles the calm of his pure heart by self-willed sinfulness, will wake to find himself not within the battlements, but lying wounded, robbed, solitary, in the pitiless desert. My brother! it is "the righteous nation" that "enters in," even here on earth.

I do not need to remind you how, admittedly by us all, that is the case in regard to the final form of the city of our God into which nothing shall enter "that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." Heaven can only be entered into hereafter by, as here and now it can only enter into, those who are pure of heart. All else there would shrivel as foul things born in the darkness do in the light, and be consumed in the fire. None but the pure can enter and see God.

"The nation which keepeth the truth"—that does not mean adherence to any revelation, or true creed,

or the like. The word which is employed means, not truth of thought, but truth of character; and might, perhaps, be better represented by the more familiar word in such a connection, "faithfulness." A man who is true to God, that keeps up a faithful relation to Him who is faithful to us, he, and only he, will tread and abide in the city.

Now, brethren, so far our text carries us, but no further; unless, perhaps, there may be a hint of something yet deeper in the next clause of this song. If anybody asks how does the nation become righteous, the answer may lie in the immediately following exhortation:—"Trust ye in the Lord for ever." But whether that be so or not, if we want an answer to the questions, How can my stained feet be cleansed so as to be fit to tread the crystal pavements? how can my foul garments be so purged as not to be a blot and an eyesore amidst the white lustrous robes that sweep along them, and gather no defilement there? the only answer that I know of is to be found by turning to the final visions of the New Testament, where the spirit of this whole section of our prophet is reproduced. Again Babylon falls amidst the songs of saints; and then, down upon all the dust and confusion of the crash of ruin, the seer beholds the Lamb's wife, the new Jerusalem, descending from above. To his happy eyes its glories are unveiled, its golden streets, its open gates, its walls of precious stones, its flashing river, its peaceful inhabitants, its light streaming from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And when that vision passes, his last message to us is, "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may enter through the gates into the city."

None but those who wash their garments, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, can, living, come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; or, dying, can pass through the iron gate that opens to them of its own accord, and find themselves as day breaks in the street of the Jerusalem which is above.

XXIII.

The Inhabitant of the Rock.

"THOU wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee.

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."—ISAIAH xxvi. 3-4.

THERE is an obvious parallel between these verses and the two preceding ones which occupied us in the last sermon. The safety which was there set forth as the result of dwelling in the strong city is here presented as the consequence of trust. The emblem of the fortified place passes into that of the Rock of Ages. There is the further resemblance in form, that, just as in the two preceding verses we had the triumphant declaration of security, followed by a summons to some unknown persons to "open the gates," so here we have the triumphant declaration of perfect peace, followed by a summons to all, to "trust in the Lord for ever." If we may suppose the invocation of the preceding verses to be addressed to the watchers at the gate of the strong city, it is perhaps not too fanciful to suppose that the invitation in my text is the watchers' answer, pointing the way by which men may pass into the city.

Whether that be so or no, at all events I take it as by no means accidental that immediately upon the statement of the Old Testament law that righteousness alone admits to the presence of God, there follow so clear and emphatic an anticipation of the great New Testament Gospel that faith is the condition of righteousness, and that immediately after hearing that only "the righteous nation which keepeth the truth" can enter there, we hear the merciful call "Trust ye in the Lord for ever." So, then, I think we have in the words before us, though not formally yet really, very large teaching as to the nature, the objects, the blessed effects, and the universal duty of that trust in the Lord which makes the very nexus between man and God, according to the teaching of the New Testament.

I.—First, then, I desire to notice in a sentence the insight into the true nature of trust or faith given by the word employed here.

Now the literal meaning of the expression here rendered "to trust" is to lean upon anything. As we say, trust is reliance. As a weak man might stay his faltering tottering steps upon some strong staff, or might lean upon the outstretched arm of a friend, so we, conscious of our weakness, aware of our faltering feet, and realizing the roughness of the road, and the smallness of our strength, may lay the whole weight of ourselves upon the loving strength of Jehovah. And that is the trust of the Old Testament, the faith of the New—the simple act of reliance going out of myself to find the basis of my being, forsaking myself to touch and rest upon the ground of my security, passing from my own weakness and laying my

trembling hand in the strong hand of God, like some weak-handed youth on a coach-box who turns to a stronger beside him and says: "Take thou the reins, for I am feeble to direct or to restrain." Trust is reliance, and reliance is always blessedness.

II.—Notice, secondly, the steadfast peacefulness of trust.

Now there are difficulties about the rendering and precise significance of the first verse of my text with which I do not need to trouble you. The Authorized Version, and still more, perhaps, the Revised Version, gives substantially, as I take it, the prophet's meaning; and the margin of the Revised Version is still more literal and accurate than the text, "The steadfast mind Thou wilt keep in peace, because it trusteth in Thee." If this, then, be the true meaning of the words, you observe that it is the steadfast mind, steadfast because it trusts, which God keeps in the deep peace that is expressed by the reduplication of the word.

And if we break up that complex thought into its elements, it just comes to this, first, that trust makes steadfastness. Most men's lives are blown about by winds of circumstance, directed by gusts of passion, shaped by accidents, and are fragmentary and jerky, like some ship at sea with nobody at the helm, heading here and there, as the force of the wind or the flow of the current may carry them. If my life is to be steadied, there must not only be a strong hand at the tiller, but some outward object which shall be for me the point of aim and the point of rest. No man can steady his life except by clinging to a holdfast without himself. Some of us look for that stay in the fluctua-

tions and fleetingnesses of creatures; and some of us are wiser and saner, and look for it in the steadfastness of the unchanging God. The men who do the former are the sport of circumstances, and the slaves of their own natures, and there is no consistency of noble aim and effort throughout their lives, corresponding to their circumstances, relations, and nature. Only they who stay themselves upon God, and get down through all the superficial shifting strata of drift and gravel to the base-rock, are steadfast and solid.

My brother, if you want to govern yourself you must let God govern you. If you want to be firm you must draw your firmness from the unchangingness of that Divine nature which you grasp. How can a willow be stiffened into an iron pillar? Only—if I might use such a violent metaphor—when it receives into its substance the iron particles that it draws from the soil in which it is rooted. How can a bit of thistledown be kept motionless amidst the tempest? Only by being glued to something that is fixed. What do men do with light things on deck when the ship is pitching? Lash them to a fixed point. Lash yourselves to God by simple trust, and then you will partake of His serene immutability in such fashion as it is possible for the creature to participate in the attributes of the Creator.

And then, still further, the steadfast mind—steadfast because it trusts—is rewarded in that it is kept of God. It is no mere mistake in the order of his thought which leads this prophet to allege that it is the steadfast mind which God keeps. For, though it be true, on the one hand, that the real fixity and

solidity of a human character come more surely and fully through trust in God than by any other means, on the other hand, it is true that, in order to receive the full blessed effects of trust into our characters and lives, we must persistently and doggedly keep on in the attitude of confidence. If a man holds out to God a tremulous hand with a shaking cup in it, which he sometimes presents and sometimes twitches back, it is not to be expected that God will pour the treasure of His grace into such a vessel, with the risk of most of it being spilt upon the ground. There must be a steadfast waiting if there is to be a continual flow.

It is the mind that cleaves to God which God keeps. I suppose that there was floating before Paul's thoughts some remembrance of this great passage of the evangelical prophet when he uttered his words, which ring so curiously with so many echoes of them, when he said, "The peace of God which passeth understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." It is the steadfast mind that is kept in perfect peace. If we "keep ourselves," by that Divine help which is always waiting to be given, "in the" faith and "love of God," He will keep us in the hour of temptation, will keep us from falling, and will garrison our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And then, still further, this faithful, steadfast heart and mind, kept by God, is a mind filled with deepest peace. There is something very beautiful in the prophet's abandoning the attempt to find any adjective of quality which adequately characterizes the peace of which he has been speaking. He falls back upon an expedient which is a confession of the

impotence of human speech worthily to portray its subject when he simply says, "Thou shalt keep in peace, peace . . . because he trusteth in Thee." The reduplication expresses the depth and completeness of the tranquillity which flows into the heart. Such continuity, wave after wave, or rather ripple after ripple, is possible even for us. For, dear brethren, the possession of this deep, unbroken peace does not depend on the absence of conflict, or of distraction, trouble, or sorrow, but on the presence of God. If we are in touch with Him, then our troubled days may be calm, and beneath all the surface tumult there may be a centre of rest. A man in some high hill-fortress looks down upon the open where the enemy's ranks are crawling like insects across the grass, and he scarcely hears the noise of the tumult, and no arrow can reach his lofty hold. So up in God we may dwell at rest whate'er betide. Strange that we should prefer to live down amongst the unwalled villages, which every spoiler can harry and burn, when we might climb, and by the might and the magic of trust in the Lord, bring round about ourselves a wall of fire which shall burn the poison out of the evil, even whilst it permits the sorrow to do its beneficent work upon us.

III.—So, note again the worthiness of the Divine name to evoke, and the power of the Divine character to reward, the trust.

We pass to the last words of my text:—"In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Now I suppose we all know that the words feebly rendered in the Authorized Version "everlasting strength" are literally "the Rock of Ages"; and that

this verse is the source of that hallowed figure which, by one of the greatest of our English hymns, is made familiar and immortal to all English-speaking people.

But there is another peculiarity about the words on which I dwell for a moment, and that is that here we have, for one of the only two times in which the expression occurs in Scripture, the great name of Jehovah reduplicated. "In Jah Jehovah is the Rock of Ages." In the former verse the prophet had given up in despair the attempt to characterize the peace which God gave, and fallen back upon the expedient of naming it twice over. In this verse, with similar eloquence of reticence, he abandons the attempt to describe or characterize that great name, and once more, in adoration, contents himself with twice taking it upon his lips, in order to *impress* what he cannot *express*, the majesty and the sufficiency of that name.

What, then, is the force of that name? We do not need, I suppose, to do more than simply remind you that there are two great thoughts communicated by that self-revelation of God which lies in it. *Jehovah*, in its literal grammatical signification, puts emphasis upon the absolute, underived, and therefore unlimited, unconditioned, unchangeable, eternal being of God. "I AM THAT I AM." Men and creatures are what they are made, are what they become, and some time or other cease to be what they were. But God is what He is, and is because He is. He is the Source, the Motive, the Law, the Sustenance of His own Being; and changeless and eternal He is for ever. In that name is the Rock of Ages.

That mighty Name, by its place in the history of Revelation, conveys to us still further thoughts, for it is

the Name of the God who entered into covenant with His ancient people, and remains bound by His covenant to bless us. That is to say, He hath not left us in darkness as to the methods and purpose of His dealings with us, or as to the attitude of His heart towards us. He has bound Himself by solemn words, and by deeds as revealing as words. So we can reckon on God. To use a vulgarism which is stripped of its vulgarity if employed reverently, as I would do it—we know where to have Him. He has given us the elements to calculate His orbit; and we are sure that the calculation will come right. So, because the Name flashes upon men the thought of an absolute Being, eternal, and all-sufficient, and self-modified, and changeless, and because it reveals to us the very inmost heart of the mystery, and makes it possible for us to forecast the movements of this great Sun of our heavens, therefore in the name "Jah Jehovah is the Rock of Ages."

The metaphor needs no expansion. We understand that it conveys the idea of unchangeable defence. As the cliffs tower above the river that swirls at their base, and takes centuries to eat the faintest line upon their shining surface, so the changeless God rises above the stream of time, of which the brief breakers are human lives, "sparkling, bursting, borne away." They who fasten themselves to that Rock are safe in its unchangeable strength. God the Unchangeable is the amulet against any change that is not growth in the lives of those who trust Him. Some of us may recall some great precipice rising above the foliage, which stands to-day as it did when we were boys, unwasted in its silent strength, while generations of

leaves have opened and withered at its base, and we have passed from childhood to age. Thus, unaffected by the transiency that changes all beneath, God rises the Rock of Ages in whom we may trust. "The conies are a feeble folk, but they make their houses in the rocks." So our weakness may house itself there and be at rest.

IV.—Lastly, note the summons to trust.

We know not whose voice it is that is heard in the last words of my text, but we know to whose ears it is addressed. It is to all. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever."

Surely, surely the blessed effects of trust, of which we have been speaking, have a voice of merciful invitation summoning us to exercise it. The promise of peace appeals to the deepest, though often neglected and misunderstood, longings of the human heart. "Inly we sigh for that repose." Oh! dear brethren, if it be true that into our agitated and struggling lives there may steal, and in them there may abide, this priceless blessing of a great tranquillity, surely nothing else should be needed to woo us to accept the conditions and put forth the trust. It is strange that we should turn away, as we are all tempted to do, from that rest in God, and try to find repose in what was only meant for stimulus, and is altogether incapable of imparting calm. Storms live in the lower regions of the atmosphere; get up higher and there is peace. Waves dash and break on the surface region of the ocean; get down deeper, nearer the heart of things, and again there is peace.

Surely the name of the Rock of Ages is an invitation to us to put our trust in Him. If a man knew

God as He is, he could not choose but trust Him. It is because we have blackened His face with our own doubts, and darkened His character with the mists that rise from our own sinful hearts, that we have made that bright sun in the heavens, which ought to fall upon our hearts with healing in its beams, into a lurid ball of fire that shines threatening through the dim obscurity of our misty hearts. But if we knew Him we should love Him, and if we would only listen to His own self-revelation we should find that He draws us to Himself by the manifestation of Himself, as the sun binds all the planets to his mass and his flame by the eradiation of his own mystic energies.

The summons is a summons to a faith corresponding to that upon which it is built. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord is the strength that endures for ever. Our continual faith is the only fit response to His unchanging faithfulness. Build rock upon rock.

The summons is a summons addressed to us all. "Trust ye"—whoever ye are—"in the Lord for ever." You and I, dear friends, hear the summons in a yet more beseeching and tender voice than was audible to the prophet, for our faith has a nobler object, and may have a mightier operation, seeing that its object is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"; and its operation, to bring to us peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When from the cross there comes to all our hearts the merciful invitation, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," why should not we each answer,

> "Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee!"

XXIV.

An Outline of the Devout Life.

"For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.

"Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.

"Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways.

"When men are cast down thou shalt say: . . . lifting up; and He shall save the humble person."—Job xxii. 26, 29.

THESE words are a fragment of one of the speeches of Job's friends, in which the speaker has been harping on the old theme that affliction is the consequence and evidence of sin. He has much ado to square his theory with facts, and especially with the fact which brought him to Job's dunghill. But he gets over the difficulty by the simple method of assuming that, since his theory must be true, there must be unknown facts which vindicate it in Job's case, and, since affliction is a sign of sin, Job's afflictions are proof that he has been a sinner. So he charges him with grossest crimes, without a shadow of other reason; and after having poured this oil of vitriol into his wounds by way of consolation, he advises him to be good, on the decidedly low and selfish ground that it will pay.

His often-quoted exhortation, "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee," is, in his meaning of it, an undisguised appeal to purely selfish considerations, and its promise is not in accordance with facts. Whether that saying is noble and true or ignoble and false depends on the meanings attached to "peace" and "good." A similar flaw mars the words of our text, as understood by the speaker. But they can be raised to a higher level than that on which he placed them, and regarded as describing the sweet and wonderful prerogatives of the devout life. So understood, they may rebuke and stimulate and encourage us to make our lives conform to the ideal here.

I.—I note, first, that life may be full of delight and confidence in God.

"Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God." Now, when we "delight" in a thing or a person, we recognize that that thing, or person, fits into a cleft in our hearts, and corresponds to some need in our natures. We not only recognize its good, sweetness, and adaptation to ourselves, but we actually possess, in real fruition, the sweetness that we recognize, and the good which we apprehend in it. And so these things, the recognition of the supreme sweetness and all-perfect adaptation and sufficiency of God to all that I need, the suppression of tastes and desires which may conflict with that sweetness, and the actual enjoyment and fruition of the sweetness and preciousness which I apprehend—these things are the very heart of a man's religion. Without delight in God, there is no real religion.

The next words of my text will help us to answer. "Thou shalt lift up thy face unto God." That is a clear enough metaphor to express frank confidence of approach to Him. The head hangs down in the consciousness of demerit and sin. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me," wailed the Psalmist, "so that I am not able to look up." But it is possible for men to go into God's presence with a sense of peace, and to hold up their heads before their Judge and look Him in the eyes and not be afraid. And unless we have that confidence in Him, not because of our merits, but because of His certain love, there will be no "delight in the Lord." And there will be no such confidence in Him unless we have "access with confidence by faith" in that Christ who has taken away our sins, and prepared the way for us into the Father's presence, and by whose death and sacrifice, and by it alone, we sinful men, with open face and uplifted foreheads, can stand to receive upon our visage the full beams of His light, and to expatiate and be glad therein. There is no religion worth naming, of which the heart is not delight in God. There is no "delighting in God" possible for sinful men unless they can come to Him with frank confidence, and there is no such confidence possible for us unless we apprehend by faith, and thereby make our own, the great work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

II.—So, secondly, note, such a life of delighting in God will be blessed by the frankest intercourse with Him.

"Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows." These are three stages of this blessed communion that is

possible for men. And note, prayer is not regarded in this aspect as duty, nor is it even dwelt upon as privilege, but as being the natural outcome and issue of that delighting in God and confident access to Him which have preceded. That is to say, if a man really has set his heart on God, and knows that in Him is all that he needs, then, of course, he will tell Him everything. As surely as the sunshine draws out the odours from the opening petals of the flowers, will the warmth of the felt Divine light and love draw from our hearts the sweet confidence, which it is impossible not to give to Him in whom we delight.

If you have to be driven to prayer by a sense of duty, and if there be no impulse in your heart whispering ever to you, "Tell your Love about it!" you have much need to examine into the reality, and certainly into the depth, of your religion. For as surely as instinctive impulse, which needs no spurring from conscience or will, leads us to breathe our confidences to those that we love best, and makes us restless whilst we have a secret hid from them, so surely will a true love to God make it the most natural thing in the world to put all our circumstances, wants, and feeling into the shape of prayers. They may be in briefest words. They may scarcely be vocalized at all, but there will be, if there be a true love to Him, an instinctive turning to Him in every circumstance; and the single-worded cry, if it be no more, for help is sufficient. The arrow may be shot towards Heaven, though it be but slender and short, and it will reach its goal.

For my text goes on the second stage, "He shall hear thee." That was not true as Eliphaz meant it.

But it is true if we remember the preceding conditions. The fundamental passage, which I suppose underlies part, at least, of our text, is that great word in the psalm, "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Does that mean that if a man loves God he may get everything he wants? Yes! and No! If it is supposed to mean that our religion is a kind of key to God's storehouse, enabling us to go in there and rifle it at our pleasure, then it is not true; if it means that a man who delights himself in God will have his supreme desire set upon God, and so will be sure to get it, then it is true. Fulfil the conditions and you are sure of the promise. If our prayer in its deepest essence be, "Not my will, but Thine," it will be answered. When the desires of our heart are for God, and for conformity to His will, as they will be when we "delight ourselves in Him," then we get our hearts' desires. That is no promise of our being able to impose our wills upon God, which would be a calamity, and not a blessing, but a promise that they who make Him their joy and their desire will never be defrauded of their desire nor robbed of their joy.

And so the third stage of this frank intercourse comes. "Thou shalt pay thy vows." All life may become a thankoffering to God for the benefits that have flowed unceasing from His hands. First a prayer, then the answer, then the rendered thank-offering. And so, in swift alternation and reciprocity, is carried on the commerce between heaven and earth, between man and God. The desires rise to heaven, but heaven comes down to earth first, and prayer is not the initial stage, but the second, in the

process. God first gives His promise, and the best prayer is the catching up of God's promise and tossing it back again whence it came. Then comes the second downward motion, which is the answer to prayer, in blessing, and on it follows, finally, the reflection upwards, in thankful surrender and service, of the love that has descended on us, in answer to our desires. So, like sunbeams from a mirror, or heat from polished metal, backwards and forwards, in continual alternation and reciprocation of influence and of love, flash and travel bright gleams between the soul and God. "Truth springs out of the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. Our God shall give that which is good, and the earth shall yield her increase." Is there any other life of which such alternation is the privilege and the joy?

III.—Then, thirdly, such a life will neither know failure nor darkness.

"Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee, and the light shall shine upon thy ways." Then is my will to be omnipotent, and am I to be delivered from the experiences of disappointments and failures and frustrated plans that are common to all humanity, and an essential part of its discipline, because I am a Christian man? Eliphaz may have meant that, but we know something far nobler. Again, I say, remember the conditions precedent. First of all, there must be the delight in God, and the desire towards Him, the submission of the will to Him, and the waiting before Him for guidance. I decree a thing—if I am a true Christian, and in the measure in which I am—only when I am quite sure that God has decreed it. And

it is only His decrees, registered in the chancery of my will, of which I may be certain that they shall be established. There will be no failures to the man whose life's purpose is to serve God, and to grow like Him; but if our purpose is anything less than that, or if we go arbitrarily and self-willedly, resolving and saying, "Thus I will; thus I command; let my will stand instead of reason," we shall have our presumptuous "decrees" disestablished many a time. If we run our heads against stone walls in that fashion, the walls will stand, and our heads will be broken. To serve Him, and to fall into the line of His purpose, and to determine nothing, nor obstinately want anything until we are sure that it is His will; that is the secret of never failing in what we undertake.

We must understand a little more deeply than we are apt to do what is meant by "success," before we predict unfailing success for any man. But if we have obeyed the commandment from the psalm already quoted, which may be again alluded to in the words of my text—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him"—we shall inherit the ancient promise, "And He shall bring it to pass." "All things work together for good to them that love God." And in the measure of our love to Him are our discernment and realization of what is truly good. Religion gives no screen to keep the weather off us, but it gives us an insight into the truth that storms and rain are good for the only crop that is worth growing here. If we understand what we are here for, we shall be very slow to call sorrow evil, and to crown joy with the exclusive title of blessing and good; and we shall have a deeper canon of interpretation for the

words of my text than he who is represented as speaking them ever dreamed of.

So with the promise of light to shine upon our paths. It is "the light which never was on sea or land": and not the material light which sense-bound eyes can see. That may all go. But if we have God in our hearts there will be a light upon our way, "which knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning." The Arctic winter, sunless though it be, has a bright heaven radiant with a myriad stars, and flashing with strange lights born of no material or visible orb. And so you and I, if we delight ourselves "in the Lord," will have an unsetting sun to light our paths; "and at eventide," and in the mirkest midnight, "there will be light" in the darkness.

IV.—Lastly, such a life will be always hopeful, and finally crowned with deliverance.

"When they"—that is, the ways that he has been speaking about—"when they are cast down, thou shalt say, lifting up." That is an exclamation or a prayer, and we might simply render, "thou shalt say, Up." Even in so blessed a life as has been described, times will come when the path plunges downwards into some valley of the shadow of death. But even then the traveller will bate no jot of hope. He will in his heart say Up even while sense says Down, either as expressing indomitable confidence and good cheer in the face of depressing circumstances, or as pouring out a prayer to Him who "has showed him great and sore troubles" that He would "bring him up again from the depths of the earth." The devout life is largely independent of circumstances, and is upheld and calmed by quiet certainty that the general

trend of its path is upward, which enables it to trudge hopefully down an occasional dip in the road.

Such an obstinate hopefulness and cheery confidence is the natural result of the experiences already described in the text. If we delight in God, hold communion with Him and have known Him as answering our prayer, prospering our purposes, and illuminating our paths, how shall we not hope? Nothing need depress nor perturb those whose joys and treasure are safe above the region of change and loss. If our riches are there where neither moth, rust, nor thieves can reach, our hearts will be there also, and an inward voice will keep singing, Lift up your heart. It is the prerogative of experience to light up the future. It is the privilege of Christian experience to make hope certainty. If we live the life outlined in these verses, we shall be able to bring June into December, and feel the future warmth whilst our bones are chilled with the present cold. "When the paths are made low, thou shalt say, Up."

And the end will vindicate such confidence. For the issue of all will be, "He will save the humble person"; namely, the man who is of the character described, and who is "lowly of eyes" in conscious unworthiness, even while he lifts up his face to God in confidence in his Father's love. The "saving" meant here is, of course, temporary, and temporal deliverance from passing outward peril. But we may permissibly give it wider and deeper meaning. Continuous partial deliverances lead on to and bring about final full salvation.

We read that into the words, of course. But nothing less than a complete and conclusive deliver-

alone can be the legitimate end of the experience of the Christian life here. Absurdity can no further go than to suppose that a soul which has delighted itself in God, and looked in His face with frank confidence, and poured out its desires to Him, and been the recipient of wonderful answers, and the seat of wonderful thanksgivings, has travelled along life's common way in cheerful godliness, has had the light of heaven shining on the path, and has found an immortal hope springing, as the natural result of present experience, shall at the last be frustrated of all, and lie down in unconscious sleep, which is nothing more. If that were the end of a Christian life, then "the pillared firmament were rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble." No, no! A heaven of endless blessedness and close communion with God is the only possible ending to the facts of the devout life on earth.

We have such a life offered to us all and made possible through faith in Jesus Christ, in whom we may delight ourselves in the Lord, by whom we have "access with confidence," who is Himself the light of our hope, the answer of our prayers, the joy of our hearts, and who will "deliver us from every evil work" as we travel along the road, "and save us" at last "into His heavenly kingdom," where we shall be joined to the Delight of our souls, and drink for evermore of the fountain of life.

XXV.

Lamps and Bushels.

"And Jesus said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?"—Mark iv. 21.

THE furniture of a very humble Eastern home is brought before us in this saying. In the original, each of the nouns has the definite article attached to it, and so suggests that in the house there was but one of each article; one lamp, a flat saucer with a wick swimming in oil; one measure for corn and the like; one bed, raised slightly, but sufficiently to admit of a flat vessel being put under it without danger, if for any reason it were desired to shade the light; and one lampstand.

The saying appeals to common sense. A man does not light a lamp and then smother it. The act of lighting implies the purpose of illumination, and, with everybody who acts logically, its sequel is to put the lamp on a stand, where it may be visible. It is all part of the nightly routine of every Jewish household. Jesus had often watched it; and, commonplace as it is, it had suggested to Him large truths. If our eyes were opened to the suggestions

of common life, we should find in them many parables and reminders of high matters.

Now this saying is a favourite and familiar one of our Lord's, occurring four times in the Gospels. It is interesting to notice that He, too, like other teachers, had His favourite sayings, which He turned round in all sorts of ways, and presented as reflecting light at different angles and suggesting different thoughts. The four occurrences of the saying are these. In my text, and in the parallel in Luke's Gospel, it is appended to the Parable of the Sower, and forms the basis of the exhortation, "Take heed how ye hear." In another place in Luke's Gospel it is appended to our Lord's words about "the sign of the prophet Jonah," which is explained to be the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it forms the basis of the exhortation to cultivate the single eye which is receptive of the light. In the Sermon on the Mount it is appended to the declaration that the disciples are the lights of the world, and forms the basis of the exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men." I have thought that it may be interesting and instructive if in this sermon we throw together these three applications of this one saying, and try to study the threefold lessons which it yields, and the weighty duties which it enforces.

I.—So, then, I have to ask you, first, to consider that we have a lesson as to the apparent obscurities of revelation and of our duty concerning them.

That is the connection in which the words occur in our text, and in the other place in Luke's Gospel to which I have referred. Our Lord has just been speaking the Parable of the Sower. The disciples' curiosity has

been excited as to its significance. They ask Him for an explanation, which He gives minutely, point by point. Then He passes to this general lesson of the purpose of the apparent veil which He had cast round the truth by throwing it into a parabolic form. In effect He says: "If I had meant to hide My teaching by the form into which I cast it, I should have been acting as absurdly and contradictorily as a man would do who should light a lamp and immediately obscure it." True, there is the veil of parable, but the purpose of that relative concealment is not hiding, but revelation. "There is nothing covered but that it should be made known." The veil sharpens attention, stimulates curiosity, quickens effort, and so becomes positively subsidiary to the great purpose of revelation for which the parable is spoken. The existence of this veil of sensuous representation carries with it the obligation, "Take heed how ye hear."

Now all these truths have a far wider application than in reference to our Lord's parables. And I may suggest one or two of the thoughts that flow from the wider reference of the words before us. "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not under a candlestick?"

There are no gratuitous and dark places in anything that God says to us. His revelation is absolutely clear. We may be sure of that if we consider the purpose for which He spoke at all. True, there are dark places; true, there are great gaps; true, we sometimes think, "Oh! it would have been so easy for Him to have said one word more; and the one word more would have been so infinitely precious to bleeding hearts or wounded consciences or puzzled under-

standings." But "is a candle brought to be set under a bushel?" Do you think that if He took the trouble to light it He would immediately smother it, or arbitrarily conceal anything that the very purpose of the revelation declares His intention to make known? His own great word remains true, "I have never spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth." If there be, as there are, obscurities, there are none there that would have been better away.

For the intention of all God's hiding—which hiding is an integral part of His revealing—is not to conceal, but to reveal. The best way sometimes of making a thing known to men is to veil it in some measure, in order that the very obscurity, like the morning mists, which prophesy a blazing sun in a clear sky by noonday, may demand search and quicken curiosity and spur to effort. He is not a wise teacher who makes things too easy. It is good that there should be difficulties; for difficulties are like the veins of quartz in the soil, which may turn the edge of the ploughshare or the spade, but prophesy that there is gold there for the man that comes with fitting tools. Wherever, in the broad land of God's word to us, there lie dark places, there are assurances of future illumination. God's hiding is in order to revelation, even as the prophet of old, when he was describing the great Theophany which flashed in light from the one side of the heaven to the other, exclaimed, "There was the hiding of His power."

> "He hides the purpose of His grace
> To make it better known."

And the end of all the concealments, and apparent and real obscurities, that hang about His Word, is

that for many of them patient and diligent attention and docile obedience should unfold them here, and for the rest, "the day shall declare them." The lamp is the light for the night-time, and it leaves many a corner in dark shadow; but, when "night's candles are burnt out, and day sits jocund on the misty mountain-tops," much will be plain that cannot be made plain now.

Therefore, for us the lesson from this assurance that God will not stultify Himself by giving to us a revelation that does not reveal, is, "Take heed how ye hear." The effort will not be in vain; patient attention will ever be rewarded. The desire to learn will not be frustrated. In this school truth lightly won is truth loosely held; and only the attentive scholar is the receptive and retaining disciple. A great man once said, and said too presumptuously and proudly, that he had rather have the search after truth than truth. But yet there is a sense in which the saying may be modifiedly true, for, precious as is all the revelation of God, not the least precious effect that it is meant to produce upon us is the consciousness that there are unscaled heights above, and unplumbed depths beneath, and untraversed spaces all round us in it; and that for us that word is like the pillar of cloud and fire that moved before Israel, blended light and darkness with a single office of guidance, and ever before us to draw desires and feet after it. The lamp is set upon a stand. "Take heed how ye hear."

II.—Secondly, the saying in another application on our Lord's lips gives us a lesson as to Himself and our attitude to Him.

I have already pointed out the other instance in Luke's Gospel in which this saying occurs, in the 11th chapter, where it is brought into immediate connection with our Lord's declaration that the sign to be given to His generation was "the sign of the prophet Jonah," which sign He explains as being reproduced in His own case, in His resurrection. And then He adds the saying of our text, and immediately passes on to speak about the light in us which perceives the lamp, and the need of cultivating the single eye.

So, then, we have in the figure thus applied the thought that the earthly life of Jesus Christ necessarily implies a subsequent elevation from which He shines down upon all the world. God lit that lamp, and it is not going to be quenched in the darkness of the grave. He is not going to stultify Himself by sending the light of the world, and then letting the endless shades of death muffle and obscure it. But, just as the conclusion of the process which is begun in the kindling of the light is setting it on high on the stand, that it may beam over all the chamber, so the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, His exaltation to the supremacy from which He shall draw all men unto Him, is the necessary and, if I may so say, the logical result of the facts of His incarnation and death.

Then from this there follows what our Lord dwells upon at greater length. Having declared that the beginning of His course involved the completion of it in His exaltation to glory, He then goes on to say to us, "You have an organ that corresponds to Me. I am the kindled lamp; you have the seeing eye." If

the eye were not sunlike, says the great German thinker, how could it see the sun? If there were not in me that which corresponds to Jesus Christ, He would be no Light of the world, and no light to me. My reason, my affection, my conscience, my will, the whole of my spiritual being, answer to Him as the eye does to the light, and for everything that is in Christ there is in humanity something that is receptive, and that needs Him.

So, then, that being so, He being our light, just because He fits our needs, answers our desires, satisfies our cravings, fills the emptiness of our hearts, and brings the response to all the questions of our understandings; that being the case, if the lamp is lit and blazing on the lampstand, and you and I have eyes to behold it, take heed that you cultivate the single eye which apprehends Christ. Concentration of purpose, simplicity and sincerity of aim, a heart centred upon Him, a mind drawn to contemplate unfalteringly and without distraction of cross-lights His beauty, His supremacy, His completeness, and a soul utterly devoted to Him—these are the conditions to which that light will ever manifest itself, and illumine the whole man. But if we come with divided hearts, with distracted aims, giving Him fragments of ourselves, and seeking Him by spasms and at intervals, and having a dozen other deities in our pantheon, beside the calm form of the Christ of Nazareth, what wonder is there that we see in Him "no beauty that we should desire Him"? "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Oh! if that were our prayer, and if the effort to secure that were honestly the effort of our lives, all His loveliness, His sweetness, His adaptation to our whole

being, would manifest itself to us. The eye must be single, directed to Him, if the heart is to rejoice in His light.

I need not do more than remind you of the blessed consequence which our Lord represents as flowing from this union of the seeing heart and the revealing light—viz., "Thy whole body shall be full of light." In every eye that beholds the flame of the lamp there is a little lamp-flame mirrored and manifested. And just as what we see makes the image on the seeing organ of our body, so the Christ beheld is a Christ embodied in us; and we, gazing upon Him, "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit." Light that remains without us does not illuminate; light that passes into us is the light by which we see. And the Christ beheld is the Christ insphered in our hearts.

III.—So, lastly, this great saying gives us a lesson as to the duties of Christian men as lights in the world.

I pointed out that another instance of its occurrence is in the Sermon on the Mount, where it is transferred from the revelation of God in His word, and in His incarnate word, to the relation of Christian men to the world in which they dwell. I need not remind you how frequently that same metaphor occurs in Scripture; how in the early Jewish ritual the great seven-branched lampstand which stood first in the Tabernacle was the emblem of Israel's office in the whole world, as it rayed out its light through the curtains of the Tabernacle into the darkness of the desert. Nor need I remind you how our Lord bare witness to His

forerunner by the praise that "He was a burning and a shining light," nor how He commanded His disciples to have "their loins girt and their lamps burning," nor how He spoke the Parable of the Ten Virgins with their lamps.

From all these there follows the same general thought that Christian men, not so much by specific effort, nor by words, nor by definite proclamation, as by the raying out from them in life and conduct of a Christ-like spirit, are set for the illumination of the world. And the bearing of our text in reference to that subject is just this—our obligation as Christians to show forth the glories of Him who hath "called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" is rested upon His very purpose in drawing us to Himself, and receiving us into the number of His people. If God, in Christ, by communicating to us the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ, has made us lights of the world, it is not done in order that the light may be smothered incontinently, but His act of lighting indicates His purpose of illumination. What are you a Christian for? That you may go to heaven? Certainly! That your sins may be forgiven? No doubt! But is that the only end? Are you such a very great being as that your happiness and well-being can legitimately be the ultimate purpose of God's dealings with you? Are you so isolated from all mankind as that anything which He does for you is to be treated by you as a morsel that you can take into your corner and devour, like a grudging dog, to yourselves? By no means. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts in order that we might impart the light to

lies in that tragical story of the foolish virgins who took no oil in their vessels. If light express the outward Christian life, the oil, in accordance with the whole tenour of Scripture symbolism, expresses the inward gift of the Divine Spirit. And where that gift is neglected, where it is not earnestly sought and carefully treasured there may be a kind of smoky illumination which in the dark may pass for bright lights, but when the Lord comes such lamps shudder into extinction, and, to the astonishment of the witless five who carried them, are found to be "going out." Brethren, only He who does not quench the smoking flax, but tends it to a flame, will help us to keep our lamps bright.

First of all, then, let us gaze upon the light in Him, until we become light in the Lord. And then let us see to it, by girt loins and continual reception of the illuminating principle of the Divine Spirit's oil, that we fill our lamps with "deeds of odorous light, and hopes that breed not shame." Then, "when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends, passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night," we shall have "gained our entrance" among the "virgins wise and pure."

XXVI.

The Follies of the Wise.

"THE children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light."—LUKE xvi. 8.

THE parable of which these words are the close is remarkable in that it proposes a piece of deliberate roguery as, in some sort, a pattern for Christian people. The steward's conduct was neither more nor less than rascality. And yet, says Christ, "Do like that!"

The explanation is to be found mainly in the consideration that what was faithless sacrifice of his master's interests on the part of the steward, is, in regard to the Christian man's use of earthly gifts, the right employment of the possessions which have been entrusted to him. But there is another vindication of the singular selection of such conduct as an example, in the consideration that what is praised is not the dishonesty, but the foresight, realisation of the facts of the case, promptitude, wisdom of various kinds exhibited by the steward. And so says our Lord—shutting out the consideration of ends, and looking only for a moment at means—the world can teach the Church a great many lessons; and it would

be well for the Church if its members lived in the fashion in which the men of the world do. There is eulogium here, a recognition of splendid qualities, prostituted to low purposes; a recognition of wisdom in the adaptation of means to an end; and a limitation of the recognition because it is only "*in their generation*" that "the children of this world are wiser than the children of light."

I.—So we may look, first, at these two classes, which our Lord opposes here to one another.

"The children of the world" would have, for their natural antithesis, the children of another world. The "children of light" would have, for their natural antithesis, "the children of darkness." But our Lord so orders His words as to suggest a double antithesis, one member of which has to be supplied in each case. And He would teach us that, whoever the children of this world may be, "they are "children of darkness"; and that the "children of light" are so, just because they are the children of another world than this. Thus He limits His praise, because it is the sons of darkness that, in a certain sense, are wiser than the enlightened ones. And that is what makes the wonder and the inconsistency to which our Lord is pointing. We can understand a man being a consistent, thorough-paced fool all through. But men whose folly is so dashed and streaked with wisdom, and others whose wisdom is so spotted and blurred with folly, are the extraordinary paradoxes which experience of life presents to us.

The children of this world are of darkness; the children of light are the children of another. Now I need not spend more than a sentence or two in

further explaining these two antitheses. I do not intend to vindicate them, or to vindicate our Lord's distinct classification of men into these two halves. What does He mean by the children of this world? The old Hebrew idiom, *the children of* So-and-so, simply suggests persons who are so fully possessed and saturated with a given quality, or who belong so entirely to a given person, as that they are spoken of as if they stood to it, or to him, in the relation of children to their parents. So a child of this world is a man whose whole thoughts, aims, and objects of life are limited and conditioned by this material present. But the word which is employed here, translated rightly enough "world," is not the same as that which is often used, especially in John's writings, for the same idea. Although it conveys a similar idea, still it is different. The characteristic quality of the visible and material world which is set forth by the expression here employed is its transiency. "The children of this epoch" rather than "of this world" is the meaning of the phrase. And it suggests, not so much the inadequacy of the material to satisfy the spiritual, as the absurdity of a man fixing his hopes and limiting his aims and life-purpose within the bounds of what is destined to fade and perish. Fleeting wealth, fleeting honours, mortal loves, wisdom, and studies that pass away with the passing away of the material, these, however elevating some of them may be, however sweet some of them may be, however needful all of them are in their places—these are not the things to which a man can safely lash his being, or entrust his happiness, or wisely devote his life. And therefore the men who, ignoring the fact that

they live, and the world passes, make themselves its slaves, and itself their object, are convicted, by the very fact of the disproportion between the duration of themselves and of that which is their aim, of being children of the darkness.

And then we come to the other antithesis. The children of light are so in the measure in which their lives are not dependent exclusively upon, nor directed solely towards, the present order and condition of things. If there be a *this*, then there is a *that*. If there be an age which is qualified as being present, then that implies that there is an age or epoch which is yet to come. And that coming "age" should regulate the whole of our relations to that age which at present is. For life is continuous, and the coming epoch is the outcome of the present. As truly as the child is the father of the man, so truly is eternity the offspring of Time, and that which we are to-day determines that which we shall be through the ages. He that recognises the relations of the present and the future, who sees the small, limited things of the moment running out into the dim eternity beyond, and the track unbroken across the gulfs of death, and the broad expanse of countless years, and who therefore orders the little things here so as to secure the great things yonder, he, and only he, who has made time the "lacquey to eternity," and in his pursuit of the things seen and temporal, regards them always in the light of things unseen and eternal, is the child of light.

II.—The second consideration suggested here is, the limited and relative wisdom of the fools.

The children of this world, who are the children of

is just this, that if Christian men, in their Christian lives, would practice the virtues that the world practices, in pursuit of its shabby aims and ends, their whole Christian character would be revolutionised. Why, a boy will spend more pains in learning to whistle than half of you do in trying to cultivate your Christian character. The secret of success religiously is precisely the same as the secret of success in ordinary things. Look at the splendid qualities that go to the making of a successful housebreaker. Audacity, resource, secrecy, promptitude, persistence, skill of hand, and a hundred others, are wanted before a man can break into your back kitchen and steal your goods.

Look at the qualities that go to the making of a successful amuser of people. Men will spend endless time and pains, and devote concentration, persistence, self-denial, diligence, to learning how to play upon some instrument, how to swing upon a trapeze, how to twist themselves into abnormal contortions. Jugglers and fiddlers, and circus-riders and dancers, and people of that sort, spend far more time upon efforts to perfect themselves in their profession than ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians do to make themselves true followers of Jesus Christ. They know that nothing is to be got without working for it, and there is nothing to be got in the Christian life without working for it, any more than in any other.

Shut out the end for a moment, and look at the means. From the ranks of criminals, of amusers, and of the purely worldly men of business that we come in contact with every day, we may get lessons that ought to bring a blush to all our cheeks, when we think to ourselves how a wealth of intellectual and

moral qualities and virtues, such as we do not bring to bear on our Christian lives, are by these men employed in regard of their infinitely smaller pursuits.

Oh! brethren, we ought to be our own rebukes, for it is not only other people who show forth in other fields of life the virtues that would make so far better Christians of us, if we used them in ours, but that we ourselves carry within ourselves the condemning contrast. Look at your daily life! Do you give anything like the effort to grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that you do to make or maintain your position in the world? When you are working side by side with the children of this world for the same objects, you keep step with them, and are known to be diligent in business as they are. When you pass into the church, what do you do there? Are we not ice in one half of our lives, and fire in the other? We may well lay to heart these solemn words of our Lord, and take shame when we think that not only do the unwise, who choose the world as their portion, put us to shame in their self-denial, their earnestness, their absorption, their clear insight into facts, their swiftness in availing themselves of every opportunity, their persistence and their perseverance, but that we rebuke ourselves because of the difference between the earnestness with which we follow the things that are of this world, and the languor of our pursuit after the things that are unseen and eternal.

Of course the reasons for the contrast are easy enough to apprehend, and I do not need to spend time upon them. The objects that so have power to stimulate and to lash men into energy, continuously

through their lives, lie at hand, and a candle near will dim the sunshine beyond. These objects appeal to sense, and such make a deeper impression than things that are shown to the mind, as every picture-book may prove to us. And we, in regard of the aims of our Christian life, have to make a continual effort to bring and keep them before us, or they are crowded out by the intrusive vulgarities and dazzling brilliances of the present. And so it comes to pass that the men who hunt after trifles that are to perish set examples to the men who say that they are pursuing eternal realities. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." Go to the men of the world, thou Christian, and do not let it be said that the devil's scholars are more studious and earnest than Christ's disciples.

III.—Lastly, note the conclusive folly of the partially wise.

"In their generation," says Christ. And that is all that can be said. The circle runs round its 360 degrees, and these people take a segment of it, say forty-five degrees, and all the rest is as non-existent. If I am to call a man a wise man out and out, there are two things that I shall have to be satisfied about concerning him. The one is, What is he aiming at; and the other, How does he aim at it. In regard of the means, the men of the world bear the bell, and carry away the supremacy. Let in the thought of the end, and things change. Two questions reduce all the world's wisdom to stark, staring insanity. The first question is, What are you doing it for? And the second question is, And suppose you get that, what then? Nothing that cannot pass the barrier of these two questions satisfactorily is

other than madness, if taken to be the aim of a man's life. You have to look at the end, and the whole circumference of the circle of the human being, before you serve out the epithets of "wise" and "foolish."

I need not dwell on the manifest folly of men who give their lives to aims and ends of which I have already said that they are disproportioned to the capacity of the pursuer. Look at yourselves, brothers; these hearts of ours that need an infinite love for their satisfaction, these active spirits of ours that can never be at rest in creatural perfection; these troubled consciences of ours that stir and moan inarticulately over unperceived wounds until they are healed by Christ. How can any man with a heart and a will and a progressive spirit and intellect find what he needs in anything beneath the stars? Whose image and superscription hath it? They say unto Him, "Cæsar's"; we say, "God's." "Render unto God the things that are God's." The man who makes anything but God his end and aim is relatively wise and absolutely foolish.

Let me remind you, too, that the same sentence of folly passes, if we consider the disproportion between the duration of the objects and of him who makes them his aim. You live, and if you are a wise man, your treasures will be of the kind that last as long as you. "They call their lands after their own name; they think that their houses shall continue for ever. They go down into the dust. Their glory shall not descend after them," and, therefore, "this, their way, is their folly."

Brethren, all that I would say may be gathered into two words. Let there be a proportion between your

aims and your capacity. That signifies, let God be your end. And let there be a correspondence between your end and your means. That signifies, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Or else, when everything comes to be squared up and settled, the epitaph on your gravestone will deservedly be: "Thou fool!"

XXVII.

The Tillage of the Poor.

"MUCH food is in the tillage of the poor."—PROVERBS xiii. 23.

ALESTINE was a land of small peasant proprietors, and the institution of the Jubilee was intended to prevent the acquisition of large estates by any Israelite. The consequence, as intended, was a level of modest prosperity. It was "the tillage of the poor," the careful, diligent husbandry of the man who had only a little patch of land to look after, that filled the storehouses of the Holy Land. Hence the proverb of our text arose. It preserves the picture of the economical conditions in which it originated, and it is capable of, and is intended to have, an application to all forms and fields of work. In all it is true that the bulk of the harvested results are due, not to the large labours of the few, but to the minute, unnoticed toils of the many. Small service is true service, and the aggregate of such produces large crops. Spade husbandry gets most out of the ground. The labourer's allotment of half an acre is generally more prolific than the average of the squire's estate. Much may be made of slender gifts, small resources, and limited opportunities if carefully cultivated, as

they should be, and as their very slenderness should stimulate their being.

One of the psalms accuses "the children of Ephraim" because, "being armed and carrying bows, they turned back in the day of battle." That saying deduces obligation from equipment, and preaches a stringent code of duty to those who are in any direction largely gifted. Power to its last particle is duty, and not small is the crime of those who, with great capacities, have small desire to use them, and leave the brunt of the battle to half-trained soldiers, badly armed.

But the imagery of the fight is not sufficient to include all aspects of Christian effort. The peaceful toil of the "husbandman that labours" stands, in one of Paul's letters, side by side with the heroism of the "man that warreth." Our text gives us the former image, and so supplements that other.

It completes the lesson of the psalm in another respect, as insisting on the importance, not of the well-endowed, but of the slenderly-furnished, who are immensely in the majority. This text is a message to ordinary, mediocre people, without much ability or influence.

I.—It teaches, first, the responsibility of small gifts.

It is no mere accident that in our Lord's great parable He represents the man with the *one* talent as the hider of his gift. There is a certain pleasure in doing what we can do, or fancy we can do, well. There is a certain pleasure in the exercise of any kind of gift, be it of body or mind; but when we know that we are but very slightly gifted by Him, there is a temptation to say, "Oh, it does

not matter much whether I contribute my share to this, that, or the other work or no. I am but a poor man. My half-crown will make but a small difference in the total. I am possessed of very little leisure. The few minutes that I can spare for individual cultivation, or for benevolent work, will not matter at all. I am only an insignificant unit; noboby pays any attention to my opinion. It does not in the least signify whether I make my influence felt in regard of social, religious, or political questions, and the like. I can leave all that to the more influential men. My littleness at least has the prerogative of immunity. My little finger would produce such a slight impact on the scale that it is indifferent whether I apply it or not. It is a good deal easier for me to wrap up my talent—which, after all, is only a threepenny bit, and not a talent—and put it away and do nothing."

Yes, but then you forget, dear friend, that responsibility does not diminish with the size of the gifts, but that there is as great responsibility for the use of the smallest as for the use of the largest, and that although it does not matter very much to anybody but yourself what you do, it matters all the world to you.

But then, besides that, my text tells us that it does matter whether the poor man sets himself to make the most of his little patch of ground or not. "There is much food in the tillage of the poor." The slenderly endowed are the immense majority. There is a genius or two here and there, dotted along the line of the world's and the Church's history. The great men and wise men and mighty men and wealthy men may be counted by units, but the men that are not very much

of anything are to be counted by millions. And unless we can find some stringent law of responsibility that applies to them, the bulk of the human race will be under no obligation to do anything either for God or for their fellows, or for themselves. If I am absolved from the task of bringing my weight to bear on the side of right because my weight is infinitesimal, and I am only one in a million, suppose all the million were to plead the same excuse; what then? Then there would not be any weight on the side of the right at all. The barns in Palestine were not filled by farming on a great scale like that pursued away out on the western prairies, where one man will own, and his servants will plough a furrow for miles long, but they were filled by the small industries of the owners of tiny patches.

The "tillage of the poor," meaning thereby not the mendicant, but the peasant-owner of a little plot, yielded the bulk of the "food." The wholesome old proverb, "many littles make a mickle," is as true about the influence brought to bear in the world to arrest evil and to sweeten corruption as it is about anything besides. Christ has a great deal more need of the cultivation of the small patches that He gives to the most of us than He has even of the cultivation of the large estates that He bestows on a few. Responsibility is not to be measured by amount of gift, but is equally stringent, entire, and absolute whatsoever be the magnitude of the endowments from which it arises.

Let me remind you, too, how the same virtues and excellences can be practised in the administering of the smallest as in that of the greatest gifts. Men say —I dare say some of you have said—"Oh! if I were

eloquent like So-and-so; rich like somebody else; a man of weight and importance like some other, how I would consecrate my powers to the Master! But I am slow of speech, or nobody minds me, or I have but very little that I can give." Yes! "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." If you do not utilize the capacity possessed, to increase the estate would only be to increase the crop of weeds from its uncultivated clods. We never palm off a greater deception on ourselves than when we try to hoodwink conscience by pleading bounded gifts as an excuse for boundless indolence, and to persuade ourselves that if we could do more we should be less inclined to do nothing. The most largely endowed has no more obligation and no fairer field than the most slenderly gifted lies under and possesses.

All service coming from the same motive and tending to the same end is the same with God. Not the magnitude of the act, but the motive thereof, determines the whole character of the life of which it is a part. The same graces of obedience, consecration, quick sympathy, self-denying effort may be cultivated and manifested in the spending of a halfpenny as in the administration of millions. The smallest rainbow in the tiniest drop that hangs from some sooty eave and catches the sunlight has precisely the same lines, in the same order, as the great arch that strides across half the sky. If you go to the Giant's Causeway, or to the other end of it amongst the Scotch Hebrides, you will find the hexagonal basaltic pillars all of identically the same pattern and shape, whether their height be measured by feet or by

tenths of an inch. Big or little, they obey exactly the same law. There is "much food in the tillage of the poor."

II.—But now, note, again, how there must be a diligent cultivation of the small gifts.

The inventor of this proverb had looked carefully and sympathetically at the way in which the little peasant proprietors worked; and he saw in that a pattern for all life. It is not always the case, of course, that a little holding means good husbandry, but it is generally so; and you will find few waste corners and few unweeded patches on the ground of a man whose whole ground is measured by rods instead of by miles. There will usually be little waste time, and few neglected opportunities of working in the case of the peasant whose subsistence, with that of his family, depends on the diligent and wise cropping of the little patch that does belong to him.

And so, dear brethren, if you and I have to take our place in the ranks of the one-talented men, the commonplace run of ordinary people, the more reason for us to enlarge our gifts by a sedulous diligence, by an unwearied perseverance, by a keen look-out for all opportunities of service, and above all by a prayerful dependence upon Him from whom alone comes the power to toil, and who alone gives the increase. The less we are conscious of large gifts the more we should be bowed in dependence on Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; and who gives according to His wisdom; and the more earnestly should we use that slender possession which God may have given us. Industry applied to small natural capacity

will do far more than larger power rusted away by sloth. You all know that it is so in regard of daily life, and common business, and the acquisition of mundane sciences and arts. It is just as true in regard of the Christian race, and of the Christian Church's work of witness.

Who are they who have done the most in this world for God and for men? The largely endowed men? "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called." The coral insect is microscopic, but it will build up from the profoundest depth of the ocean a reef against which the whole Pacific may dash in vain. It is the small gifts that, after all, are the important ones. So let us cultivate them the more earnestly, the more humbly we think of our own capacity. "Play well thy part; there all the honour lies." God, who has builded up some of the towering Alps out of mica flakes, builds up His Church out of infinitesimally small particles — slenderly endowed men touched by the consecration of His love.

III.—Lastly, let me remind you of the harvest reaped from these slender gifts when sedulously tilled.

Two great results of such conscientious cultivation and use of small resources and opportunities may be suggested as included in that abundant "food" of which the text speaks.

The faithfully used faculty increases. "To him that hath shall be given." "Oh, if I had a wider sphere how I would flame in it, and fill it!" Then twinkle your best in your little sphere, and that will bring a wider one some time or other. For, as a rule, and in the general, though with exceptions, opportunities

come to the man that can use them; and roughly, but yet substantially, men are set in this world where they can shine to the most advantage to God. Fill your place; and if you, like Paul, have borne witness for the Master in little Jerusalem, He will not keep you there, but carry you to bear witness for Him in imperial Rome itself.

The old fable of the man who told his children to dig all over the field and they would find treasure, has its true application in regard of Christian effort and faithful stewardship of the gifts bestowed upon us. The sons found no gold, but they improved the field, and secured its bearing golden harvests, and they strengthened their own muscles, which was better than gold. So, if we want larger endowments, let us honestly use what we possess, and use will make growth.

The other issue, about which I need not say more than a word, is that the final reward of all faithful service—"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" is said, not to the brilliant, but to the "faithful," servant. In that great parable, which is the very text-book of this whole subject of gifts and responsibilities and recompense, the men who were entrusted with unequal sums used these unequal sums with equal diligence, as is manifest by the fact that they realised an equal rate of increase. He that got two talents made two more out of them, and he that had five did no more; for he, too, but doubled his capital. So, because the poorer servant with his two, and the richer with his ten, had equally cultivated their diversely-measured estates, they were identical in reward; and to each of them the same thing is said:

"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It matters little whether we copy some great picture upon a canvas as big as the side of a house, or upon a thumb-nail; the main thing is that we copy it. If we truly employ whatsoever gifts God has given to us, then we shall be accepted according to that we have, and not according to that we have not.

XXVIII.

More Value than many Sparrows.

"YEA, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God."—PSALM lxxxiv. 3.

THE well-known saying of the saintly Rutherford, when he was silenced and exiled from his parish, echoes and expounds these words. "When I think," said he, "upon the sparrows and swallows that build their nests in the kirk of Anwoth, and of my dumb Sabbaths, my sorrowful, bleared eyes look asquint upon Christ, and present Him as angry." So sighed the Presbyterian minister in his compelled idleness in a prosaic seventeenth century Scotch town, answering his heart's-brother away back in the far-off time, and in such different circumstances. The Psalmist was probably a member of the Levitical family of the Sons of Korah, who were "doorkeepers in the house of the Lord." He knew what he was saying when he preferred his humble office to all honours among the godless. He was shut out by some unknown circumstances from external participation in the tabernacle rites, and longs to be even as one of the swallows or sparrows that twitter and flit round the sacred courts.

No doubt to him faith was much more inseparably attached to form than it should be for us. No doubt place and ritual were more to him than they can permissibly be to those who have heard and understood the great charter of spiritual worship spoken first to an outcast Samaritan of questionable character: "Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall men worship the Father." But equally it is true that what he wanted was what the outward worship brought him, rather than the worship itself. And the psalm, which begins with "longing" and "fainting" for the courts of the Lord, and pronouncing benedictions on "those that dwell in Thy house," works itself clear, if I might so say, and ends with "O Lord of Hosts! Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee"—for he shall "dwell in Thy house," wherever he is. So this flight of imagination in the words of my text may suggest to us two or three lessons.

I.—I take it first as pointing a bitter and significant contrast.

"The sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself," while I! We do not know what the Psalmist's circumstances were, but if we accept the conjecture that he may have accompanied David in his flight during Absalom's rebellion, we may fancy him as wandering on the uplands across Jordan, and sharing the agitations, fears, and sorrows of those dark hours, and in the midst of all, as the little company hurried hither and thither for safety, thinking, with a touch of bitter envy, of the calm restfulness and serene services of the peaceful tabernacle.

But, pathetic as is the complaint, when regarded as the sigh of a minister of the sanctuary exiled from the

shrine which was as his home, and from the worship which was his occupation and delight, it sounds a deeper note and one which awakens echoes in our hearts, when we hear in it, as we may, the complaint of humanity contrasting its unrest with the happier lot of lower creatures. Do you remember who it was that said—and on what occasion He said it—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have roosting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head"? That saying, like our text, has a narrower and a wider application. In the former it pathetically paints the homeless Christ, a wanderer in a land peculiarly "His own," and warns His enthusiastic would-be follower of the lot which he was so light-heartedly undertaking to share. But, when Jesus calls Himself Son of Man, He claims to be the realized ideal of humanity, and when, as in that saying, He contrasts the condition of "the Son of Man" with that of the animal creation, we can scarcely avoid giving to the words their wider application to the same contrast between man's homelessness and the creatures' repose which we have found in the Psalmist's sigh.

Yes! There is only one being in this world that does not fit the world that he is in, and that is man, chief and foremost of all. Other beings perfectly correspond to what we now call their "environment." Just as the soft mollusc fits every convolution of its shell, and the hard shell fits every curve of the soft mollusc, so every living thing corresponds to its place and its place to it, and with them all things go smoothly. But man, the crown of creation, is an exception to this else universal complete adaptation.

"The earth, O Lord, is full of Thy mercy," but the only creature who sees and says that is the only one who has further to say, "I am a stranger on the earth." He and he alone is stung with restlessness and conscious of longings and needs which find no satisfaction here. That sense of homelessness may be an agony or a joy, a curse or a blessing, according to our interpretation of its meaning, and our way of stilling it. It is not a sign of inferiority, but of a higher destiny, that we alone should bear in our spirits the "blank misgivings" of those who, amid unsatisfying surroundings, have blind feelings after "worlds not realized," which elude our grasp. It is no advantage over us that every fly dancing in the treacherous gleams of an April sun, and every other creature on the earth except ourselves, on whom the crown is set, is perfectly proportioned to its place, and has desire and possessions absolutely conterminous.

"The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Why must He alone wander homeless on the bleak moorland, whilst the sparrows and the swallows have their nests and their houses? Why? Because they *are* sparrows and swallows, and He is man, and "better than many sparrows." So let us lay to heart the sure promises, the blessed hopes, the stimulating exhortations, which come from that which, at first sight, seems to be a mystery and half an arraignment of the Divine wisdom, in the contrast between the restlessness of humanity and the reposeful contentment of those whom we call the lower creatures. Be true to the unrest, brother, and do not mistake its meaning, nor seek to still it, until it drives you to God.

II.—These words bring to us a plea which we may use, and a pledge on which we may rest.

"Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God." The Psalmist pleads with God, and lays hold for his own confidence upon, the fact that creatures, who do not understand what the altar means, may build beside it, and those who have no notion of who the God is to whom the house is sacred, are yet cared for by Him. And he thinks to himself, "If I can say, '*My* King and *my* God,' surely He that takes care of them will not leave me uncared for." The unrest of the soul that is capable of appropriating God is an unrest which has in it, if we understand it aright, the assurance that it shall be stilled and satisfied. He that is capable of entering into the close personal relationship with God which is expressed by that eloquent little pronoun and its reduplication with the two words, "King" and "God"—such a creature cannot cry for rest in vain, nor in vain grope, as a homeless wanderer, for the door of the Father's house.

"Doth God care for oxen; or saith He it altogether for our sakes?" "Consider the fowls of the air; your heavenly Father feedeth them." And the same argument which the Apostle used in the one of these sayings, and our Lord in the other, is valid and full of encouragement when applied to this matter. He that "satisfies the desires of every living thing," and fills full the maw of the lowest creature; and puts the worms into the gaping beak of the young ravens, when they cry; is not the King to turn a deaf ear, or the back of His hand, to the man who can appeal to Him with this word on his lips, "My King and my God." We grasp God when we say that; and all that

we see of provident recognition and supply of wants in dealings with these lower creatures should encourage us to cherish calm unshakable confidence that every true desire of our souls after Him is as certain to be satisfied.

And so the glancing swallows around the eaves of the Temple and the twittering sparrows on its pinnacles may proclaim to us, not only the contrast, which is bitter, but the confidence, which is sweet. We may be sure that we shall not be left uncared for amongst the many pensioners at His table, and that the deeper our wants the surer we are of their supply. Our bodies may hunger in vain—bodily hunger has no tendency to bring meat; but our spirits cannot hunger in vain if they hunger after God; for that hunger is the sure precursor and infallible prophet of the coming satisfaction.

These words not only may hearten us with confidence that our desires will be satisfied if they are set upon Him, but they point us to the one way by which they come. Say "My King and my God" in the deepest recesses of a spirit conscious of His presence, of a will submitting to His authority, of emptiness expectant of His fulness; say that, and you are in the house of the Lord. For it is not a question of place, it is a question of disposition and desire. And this Psalmist, though, when he began his song, he was far away from the Temple, and though he finished it sitting on the same hillside on which he began it, when he had ended it was within the curtains of the sanctuary and wrapt about with the presence of his God. He had regained as he sang what for a moment he had lost the consciousness of when he began—viz.,

the presence of God with him on the lone, dreary expanse of alien soil as truly as amidst the sanctities of what was called His house.

So, brethren, if we want rest, let us clasp God as ours; if we desire a house warm, safe, sheltered from every wind that blows, and inaccessible to enemies, let us, like the swallows, nestle under the eaves of the Temple. Let us take God for our hope. They that hold communion with Him—and we can all do that wherever we are and whatever we may be doing—these, and only these, "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives." Therefore, with deepest simplicity of expression, our psalm goes on to describe, as equally recipients of blessedness, "those that dwell in the house of the Lord," and those in "whose heart are the ways" that lead to it, and to explain at last, as I have already pointed out, that both the dwellers in, and the pilgrims towards, that intimacy of abiding with God are included in the benediction showered on those who trust in Him, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee."

III.—Lastly, we may take this picture of the Psalmist's as a warning.

Sparrows and swallows have very small brains. They build their nests, and they do not know whose altars they are flitting around. They pursue the insects on the wing, and they twitter their little songs; and they do not understand how all their busy, glancing, brief, trivial life is being lived beneath the shadow of the cherubim, and all but in the presence of the veiled God of the Shekinah.

There are plenty of people who live like that. We are all tempted to build our nests where we may lay

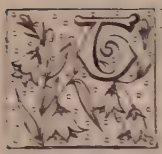
our young, or dispose of ourselves or our treasures in the very sanctuary of God, with blind, crass indifference to the Presence in which we move. The Father's house has many mansions, and wherever we go we are in God's temple. Alas! some of us have no more sense of the sanctities around us, and no more consciousness of the Divine eye that looks down upon us, than if we were so many feathered sparrows flitting about the altar.

Let us take care, brethren, that we give our hearts to be influenced, and awed, and ennobled, and tranquillized by the sense of evermore being in the house of the Lord. Let us see to it that we keep in that house by continual aspiration, cherishing in our hearts the ways that lead to it; and so making all life worship, and every place, what the pilgrim found the stone of Bethel to be, a house of God and a gate of heaven. For everywhere, to the eye that sees the things that are, and not only the things that seem—and to the heart that feels the unseen presence of the one reality, God Himself—all places are temples, and all work may be beholding His beauty and inquiring in His sanctuary; and everywhere, though our heads rest upon a stone, and there be night and solitude around us, and doubt and darkness in front of us, and danger and terror behind us, and weakness within us, as was the case with Jacob, there will be the ladder with its foot at our side and its top in the heavens; and above the top His Face, which, when we see it look down upon us, makes all places and circumstances good and sweet.

XXIX.

Christ's Encouragements.

"Son! be of good cheer."—Matt. ix. 2.



THIS word of encouragement, which exhorts to both cheerfulness and courage, is often upon Christ's lips. It is only once employed in the Gospels by any other than He. If we throw together the various instances in which He thus speaks we may get a somewhat striking view of the hindrances to such a temper of bold, buoyant cheerfulness which the world presents, and of the means for securing it which Christ provides.

But before I consider these individually, let me point you to this thought, that such a disposition, facing the inevitable sorrows, evils, and toilsome tasks of life with glad and courageous buoyancy, is a Christian duty, and is a temper not merely to be longed for, but consciously and definitely to be striven after.

We have a great deal more in our power, in the regulation of moods and tempers and disposition, than we often are willing to acknowledge to ourselves. Our "low" times—when we fret and are dull, and all things seem wrapped in gloom, and we are ready to sit down and bewail ourselves, like Job on his dunghill—

are often quite as much the results of our own imperfect Christianity as the response of our feelings to external circumstances. It is by no means an unnecessary reminder for us, who have heavy tasks set us, which often seem too heavy, and are surrounded, as we are all, with crowding temptations to be bitter and melancholy and sad, that Christ commands us to be, and therefore we ought to be "of good cheer."

Another observation may be made as preliminary, and that is, that Jesus Christ never tells people to cheer up without giving them reason for doing so. We shall see presently that in all cases where the words occur they are immediately followed by words or deeds of His which hold forth something on which, if the hearer's faith lay hold, darkness and gloom will fly like morning mists before the rising sun. The world comes to us and says, in the midst of our sorrows and our difficulties, Be of good cheer, and says it in vain, and generally only rubs salt into the sore by saying it. Jesus Christ never thus vainly preaches the duty of encouraging ourselves without giving us ample reasons for the cheerfulness which He enjoins.

With these two remarks to begin with—that we ought to make it a part of our Christian discipline of ourselves to seek to cultivate a continuous and equable temperament of calm, courageous good cheer, and that Jesus Christ never commands such a temper without showing cause for our obedience—let us turn for a few moments to the various instances in which this expression falls from His lips.

I.—Now the first of them is this of my text, and from it we learn this truth, that Christ's first contri-

bution to our temper of equable, courageous cheerfulness is the assurance that all our sins are forgiven.

"Son! be of good cheer!" said He to that poor palsied sufferer lying there upon the little light bed in front of Him. He had been brought to Christ to get cured of his palsy. Our Lord seems to offer him a very irrelevant blessing when, instead of the healing of his limbs, He offers him forgiveness of his sins. That was possibly not what he wanted most, certainly it was not what the friends who had brought him wanted for him, but Jesus knew better than they what the man suffered most from and most needed to have cured. They would have said "Palsy." He said, "Yes! but palsy that comes from sin." For no doubt the sick man's disease was "a sin of flesh avenged in kind," and so Christ went to the fountain-head when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." He therein implied, not only that the man was longing for something more than his four kindly but ignorant bearers knew, but also that the root of his disease was extirpated when his sins were forgiven.

And so, in like manner, "'tis conscience doth make cowards of us all." There is nothing that so drapes a soul with darkness as either the consciousness of unforgiven sin or the want of consciousness of forgiven sin. There may be plenty of superficial cheerfulness, I know that! And I know what the bitter wise man called it, "the crackling of thorns under the pot," which, the more they crackle, the faster they turn into powdery ash, and lose all their warmth. For stable, deep, lifelong, reliable courage and cheerfulness, there must be thorough work made with the black spot in the heart, and the black lines in the

history. And unless our comforters can come to us and say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," they are only chattering nonsense, and singing songs to a heavy heart which will make an effervescence "like vinegar on nitre," when they say to us, "Be of good cheer." How can I be glad if there lie coiled in my heart that consciousness of alienation, and disorder in my relations with God, which all men carry with them, though they overlay it and try to forget it? There is no basis for a peaceful gladness worthy of a man except that which digs deep down into the very secrets of the heart, and lays the first course of the building in the consciousness of pardoned sin. "Son! be of good cheer!" Lift up thy head! Face smaller evils without discomposure, and with quietly throbbing pulses, for the fountain of possible terrors and calamities is stanched and stayed with, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Side by side with this first instance, illustrating the same general thought, though from a somewhat different point of view, I may put another of the cases in which the same phrase was soothingly on our Lord's lips. "Daughter!" said He to the poor woman with the issue of blood, "be of good cheer, Thy faith hath saved thee." The consciousness of a living union with God through Christ by faith, which results in the present possession of a real, though it may be a partial, salvation, is indispensable to the temper of equable cheerfulness of which I have been speaking. Apart from that consciousness, you may get plenty of excitement, but no lasting calm. The contrast between the drugged and effervescent potion which the world gives as a cup of

gladness and the pure tonic which Jesus Christ administers for the same purposes is infinite. He says to us, "I forgive thy sins. By thy faith I save thee! Go in peace." And the burdened heart is freed from its oppression, and the downcast face is lifted up, and all things around change, as when the sunshine comes out on the wintry landscape, and the very snow sparkles into diamonds. So much, then, for the first of the instances of the use of this phrase.

II.—We now take a second. Jesus Christ ministers to us cheerful courage because He manifests Himself to us as a companion in the storm.

The narrative is very familar to us, so that I need not enlarge upon it. You remember the scene—our Lord alone on the mountain in prayer, the darkness coming down upon the little boat, the storm rising as the darkness fell, the wind howling down the gorges of the mountains round the landlocked lake, the crew "toiling with rowing, for the wind was contrary." And then, all at once, out of the mysterious obscurity beneath the shadow of the hills. Something is seen moving, and It comes nearer; and the waves become solid beneath that light and noiseless foot, and steadily nearer He comes. Jesus Christ uses the billows as the pavement over which He approaches His servants, and the storms which beat on us are His occasion for drawing very near. Then they think Him a spirit, and cry out with voices that were heard amidst the howling of the tempest, and struck upon the ear of whomsoever told the Evangelist the story. They cry out with a shriek of terror—because Jesus Christ is coming to them in so strange a fashion! Have *we* never shrieked and groaned, and passionately wept

aloud for the same reason; and mistaken the Lord of love and consolation for some grisly spectre? When He comes it is with the old word on His lips, "Be of good cheer!"

Tell us not to be frightened when we see something stalking across the waves in the darkness! "It is I," surely that is enough. The Companion in the storm is the Calmer of the terror. He who recognises Jesus Christ as drawing near to his heart over wild billows may well "be of good cheer," since the storm but brings his truest treasure to him.

> Well roars the storm to those who hear
> A deeper Voice across the storm.

And He who, with unwetted foot, can tread on the wave, and, with quiet voice heard above the shriek of the blast, can say, "It is I," has the right to say, "Be of good cheer," and never says it in vain to such as take Him into their lives, however tempest-tossed, and into their hearts, however tremulous.

III.—A third instance of the occurrence of this word of cheer presents Jesus as ministering cheerful courage to us by reason of His being victor in the strife with the world.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation. Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world."

Of course "the world" which He overcame is the whole aggregate of things and persons considered as separated from God, and as being the great Antagonist and counter-power to a holy life of obedience and filial devotion. At that last moment when, according to all outward seeming and the estimate of things which sense would make, He was utterly and hopelessly and all but ignominiously beaten, He says, "I have over-

come the world." What! Thou! Within four-and-twenty hours of Thy Cross? Is that victory? Yes! For he conquers the world who uses all its opposition as well as its real good to help him, absolutely and utterly, to do the will of God. And he is conquered by the world who lets it, by its glozing sweetnesses and flatteries, or by its knitted brows and frowning eyes and threatening hand, hinder him from the path of perfect consecration and entire conformity to the Father's will.

Christ has conquered. What does that matter to us? It matters this, that we may have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts to make us more than conquerors in the fight. And whosoever will lay his weakness on that strong arm, and open his emptiness to receive the fulness of that victorious Spirit for the very spirit of his life, will be "more than conqueror through Him that loved us," and he can front all the evils, dangers, threatenings, temptations of the world; and its heaped sweets and frowning antagonisms with the calm confidence that none of them are able to daunt him; and that the Victor Lord will cover his head in the day of battle and deliver him from every evil work. "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world," and play your parts like men in the good fight of faith; for I am at your back, and will help you with Mine own strength.

IV.—The last instance to which I point of the use of this phrase is one in which it was spoken by Christ's voice from heaven. It was the voice which was heard by the Apostle Paul after he had been almost torn in pieces by the crowd in the Temple, and had been bestowed for security by the half-contemptuous pro-

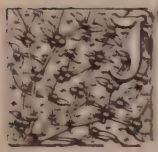
tection of the Roman governor in the castle, and was looking onward into a very doubtful future, not knowing how many hours' purchase his life might be worth. That same night the Lord appeared to him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou testify of me at Rome." That is to say, "No man can touch you until I let him!" and "Nobody shall touch you until you have done your work and spoken out your testimony." Jerusalem is a little sphere; Rome is a great one. The tools to the hand that can use them! The reward for work is more work, and work in a larger sphere. "So cheer up! for I have plenty for you to do yet."

And the spirit of that encouragement may go with us all, breeding in us the quiet confidence that no matter who may thwart or hinder, no matter what dangers or evils may seem to ring us round, the Master who bids us Be of good cheer! will give us a charmed life, and nothing shall by any means hurt us until He says to us, Be of good courage; for you have done your work; and now come and rest. "Wait on the Lord! Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

XXX.

River and Rock.

"THE world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."—1 JOHN ii. 17.



OHN has been solemnly giving a charge not to love the world, nor the things that are in it. That charge was addressed to "children," "young men," "fathers." Whether these words be taken as referring to the growth and maturity of Christian experience, or of natural life, they equally carry the lesson that no age and no stage is beyond the danger of being drawn away by the world's love, or beyond the need of the solemn dehortation therefrom.

My text is the second of the reasons which the apostle gives for his earnest charge. We all, therefore, need it, and we always need it: though, on the last Sunday of another year, it may be more than usually appropriate to turn our thoughts in its direction. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Let us lay that handful of snow on our fevered foreheads and cool our desires.

Now, there are but two things set forth in this text—a great and wonderful antithesis between something

which is in perpetual flux and passage and something which is permanent. If I might venture to cast the two thoughts into metaphorical form, I should say that here are a river and a rock. The one, the sad truth of sense, universally believed and as universally forgotten; the other, the glad truth of faith, so little regarded or operative in men's lives.

I ask you, then, to look with me for a few moments at each of these thoughts.

I.—First, then, the river, or the sad truth of sense.

Now you observe that there are two things in my text of which this transiency is predicated, the one "the world," the other "the lust thereof"; the one outside us, the other within us. As to the former, I need only, I suppose, remind you in a sentence that what John means by "the world" is not the material globe on which we dwell, but the whole aggregate of things visible and material, together with the lives of the men whose lives are directed to, and bounded by, that visible and material, and all considered as wrenched apart from God. That, and not the mere external physical creation, is what he means by "the world," and, therefore, the passing away of which he speaks is not only (although, of course, it includes) the decay and dissolution of material things, but the transiency of things which are or have to do with the visible, and are separated by us from God. Over all that, he says, there is written the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." There is a continual flowing on of the stream. As the word implies even more strongly than in our translation, "the world" is in the act of "passing away." Like the slow travelling of the scenes of some movable panorama

which glide along, even as the eye looks upon them, and are concealed behind the side flats, before the gazer has taken in the whole picture, so equably, constantly, silently, and therefore unnoticed by us, all is in a state of continual motion. There is no *present* time. Even whilst we name the moment it dies. The drops hangs for the instant on the verge, gleaming in the sunlight, and then falls into the gloomy abyss that silently sucks up years and centuries. There is no present, but all is movement.

Brethren, that has been the commonplace of moralists and poets and preachers from the beginning of time; and it would be folly for me to suppose that I can add anything to the impressiveness of the thought. All that I want to do is to wake you up to preach it to yourselves, for that is the only thing that is of any use.

> So passeth, in the passing of an hour,
> Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower.

But besides this transiency external to us, John finds a corresponding analogous transiency within us. "The world passeth, and the lust thereof." Of course the word "lust" is employed by him in a much wider sense than in our use of it. With us it means one specific and very ugly form of earthly desire. With him it includes the whole genus—all desires of every sort, more or less noble or ignoble, which have this for their characteristic, that they are directed to, stimulated by, and fed or disappointed on, the fleeting things of this outward life. If thus a man has anchored himself to that which has no perpetual stay, so long as the cable holds he follows the fate of the thing to which he has pinned himself. And if it

perish, he perishes, in a very profound sense, with it. If you trust yourselves in the leaky vessel, when the water rises in *it* it will drown *you*, and you will go to the bottom with the craft to which you have trusted yourselves. If you embark in the little ship that carries Christ and His fortunes, you will come with Him to the haven.

But these fleeting desires, of which my text speaks, point to that sad feature of human experience, that we all outgrow and leave behind us, and think of very little value, the things that once to us were all but heaven. There was a time when toys and sweetmeats were our treasures, and since that day how many burnt-out hopes we all have had! How little we should know ourselves if we could go back to the fears and wishes and desires that used to agitate us ten, twenty, thirty years ago! They lie behind us, no longer part of ourselves; they have slipped away from us, and

> We all are changed, by still degrees,
> All but the basis of the soul.

The self-conscious same man abides, and yet how different the same man is! Our lives, then, will zig-zag instead of keeping a straight course, if we let desires that are limited by anything that we can see guide and regulate us.

But, brethren, though it be a digression from my text, I cannot help touching for a moment upon a yet sadder thought than that. There are desires that *remain*, when the gratification of them has become impossible. Sometimes the lust outlasts the world, sometimes the world outlasts the lust; and one knows not whether is the sadder. There is a hell upon earth

for many of us who, having set our affections upon some creatural object, and having had that withdrawn from us, are ready to say, "They have taken away my gods and what shall I do?" And there is a hell of the same sort waiting beyond those dark gates through which we have all to pass, where men who never desired anything, except what the world that has slipped out of their reluctant fingers could give them, are shut up with impossible longing after a forever vanished good. "Father Abraham! a drop of water; for I am tormented in this flame!" That is what men come to, if the fire of their lust burn, after its objects are withdrawn.

But let me remind you that this transiency of which I have been speaking receives very strange treatment from most of us. I do not know that it is altogether to be regretted that it so seldom comes to men's consciousness. Perhaps it is right that it should not be uppermost in our thoughts always; but yet there is no vindication for the entire oblivion to which we condemn it. The march of these fleeting things is like that of cavalry with their horses' feet wrapped in straw, in the night, across the snow, silent and unnoticed. We cannot realize the revolution of the earth, because everything partakes in it. We talk about standing still, and we are whirling through space with inconceivable rapidity. By a like illusion we deceive ourselves with the notion of stability, when everything about us is hastening away. Some of you do not like to be reminded of it, and think it a killjoy, and you try to get rid of the thought, and so hide your head in the sand, and fancy that the rest of your body presents no mark to the archer's arrow. Now,

surely common sense says to all, that if there be some fact certain and plain and applying to you, which, if accepted, would profoundly modify your life, you ought to take it into account. And what I want you to do, dear friends, to-night, is to look in the face this fact, which you all acknowledge so utterly that some of you are ready to say, "What was the use of coming to a chapel to hear that threadbare old thing dinned into my ears again?" and to take it into account in shaping your lives. Have you done so? Have you? Suppose a man that lived in a land habitually shaken by earthquakes were to say, "I mean to ignore the fact; and I am going to build a house just as if there was not such a thing as an earthquake expected;" he would have it toppling about his ears very soon. Suppose a man upon the ice-slopes of the Alps were to say, "I am going to ignore slipperiness and gravitation," he would before long find himself, if there was any consciousness left in him, at the bottom of a precipice, bruised and bleeding." And suppose a man says, "I am not going to take the fleetingness of the things of earth into account at all, but am going to live as if all things were to remain as they are;" what would become of him do you think? Is he a wise man or a fool? And is he *you*? He *is* some of you. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Then, let me say to you, see that you take noble lessons out of these undeniable and all-important facts. There is one kind of lesson that I do not want you to take out of it. "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die," or, to put it into a more vulgar formula, "A short life and a merry one." The mere contem-

plation of the transiency of earthly things may, and often does, lend itself to very ignoble conclusions, and men draw from it the thought that, as life is short they had better crowd into it as much of sensual enjoyment as they can.

"Gather ye roses while ye may" is a very common keynote, struck by poets of the baser sort. And it is a thought that influences some of us, I have little doubt. Another way of putting the same thought is, "Make hay whilst the sun shines," "hurry on your getting rich, because you have not very long to do it in"; or the like.

Now all that is supremely unworthy. The true lesson to be drawn is the plain, old one which it is never superfluous to shout into men's ears, until they have obeyed it—viz., "Set not thine heart on that which is not; and which flieth away as an eagle towards heaven." Do you, dear brother, see to it that your roots go down through the gravel on the surface. Do you see to it that you dig deeper than that; and thrusting your hand, as it were, through the thin, silkpaper screen that stands between you and the Eternal, grasp the hand that you will find on the other side, waiting and ready to clasp you and to hold you up.

When they build a new house in Rome they have to dig down through sometimes sixty or a hundred feet of rubbish that runs like water, the ruins of old temples and palaces, once occupied by men in the same flush of life in which we are now. We too, have to dig down through ruins, until we get to the Rock and build there, and build secure. Withdraw your affections and your thoughts and your desires from the

fleeting, and fix them on the permanent. If a captain takes anything but the pole star for his fixed point he will lose his reckoning, and his ship will be on the reefs. If we take anything but God for our supreme delight and desire we shall perish.

Then let me say, too, let this thought stimulate us to crowd every moment, as full as it will pack, with noble work and heavenly thoughts. These fleeting hours are elastic, and you may put all but infinite treasure into them. Think of what the possibilities, for each of us, of this dying year, were on the 1st of January; and of what the realisation has been by the 31st of December. So much that we could have done; so little that we have done! So many ripples of the river have passed, bearing no golden sand to lay upon the shore! "We have been," is a sad word; but, oh! the one sad word is, "We might have been." And, so, do you see to it that you fill time with that which is kindred to eternity, and make "one day as a thousand years" in its elastic possibilities and realities of consecration and of service.

Further, let the thought help us to the conviction of the relative insignificance of all that can change. That will not spoil nor shade any real joy; rather it will add to its poignancy what prevents it from cloying or from becoming the enemy of our souls. But the thought will wondrously lighten the burden that we have to carry, and the tasks which we have to perform. "But for a moment," makes all light. There was an old rabbi, long ago, whose own real name was all but lost, because everybody nicknamed him "Rabbi This-also." The reason was because he had perpetually on his lips the saying about everything as it

came, "This also will pass." He was a wise man. Let us go to his school and learn his wisdom.

II.—Now, let me say a word, and it can only be a word, about the second of the thoughts here, which I designated as the Rock, or the glad truth of Faith.

We might have expected that John's antithesis to "the world that passeth" would have been "the God that abides." But he does not so word his sentence, although the thought of the Divine permanence underlies it. Rather over against the fleeting world he puts the abiding man who does the will of God.

Of course there is a very solemn sense in which all men, even they who have most exclusively lived for what they call the present, do last for ever, and in which their deeds do. After death is the judgment, and the issues of eternity depend upon the actions of time; and every fleeting thought comes back to the hand that projected it, like the Australian savage's boomerang that, flung out, returns and falls at the feet of the thrower. But that is not what John means by "abiding for ever." He means something very much more blessed and lofty than that; and this is the course of his thought. There is only one permanent Reality in the universe, and that is God. All else is shadow, and He is the substance. All else was, is, and is not. He is the One who is, was, and is to come, the timeless and only permanent Being. The will of God is the permanent element in all changeful material things. And consequently he who does the will of God links himself with the Divine Eternity, and becomes partaker of that solemn and blessed Being which lives above mutation.

Obedience to God's will is the permanent element

[illegible]

express goes with a smash, and there is an end. To the man who, in the trifles of time, has been obeying the will of God, and therefore subserving eternity and his interests there, the trench is bridged, and he will go on after he crosses it just as he did before, with the same purposes, the same desires, the same submission, and the same drinking into himself of the fulness of immortal life.

Brother, John tells us that obedience to the will of God brings permanence into our fleeting years. But how are we to obey the will of God? John tells us that the only way is by love. But how are we to love God? John tells us that the only way to love—which love is the only way to obedience—is by knowing and believing the love that God hath to us. But how are we to know that God hath love to us? John tells us that the only way to know the love of God—which is the only way of our loving Him, which in its turn is the only way to obedience, which again is the only way to permanence of life—is to believe in Jesus Christ and His propitiation for our sins. The river flows on for ever, but it sweeps round the base of the Rock of Ages. And in Him, by faith in His blood, we may find our sure refuge and eternal home.

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